

Mystery
of the
Tibetan
Caravan

A BIFF BREWSTER MYSTERY ADVENTURE

Mystery of the Tibetan Caravan

ANDY
ADAMS



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By ANDY ADAMS

MYSTERY OF THE TIBETAN CARAVAN

Pursuit by Communist agents, capture by dreaded Khamba tribesmen who cripple their prisoners, and an unplanned expedition into the Himalaya Mountains change Biff Brewster in his attempt to smuggle the Glowing Buddha, sacred symbol of the Dalai Lama, out of Red-occupied Tibet.

The mission, originally undertaken by Biff's father, grows more dangerous hourly when the Reds, who have tried for years to get their hands on the statue, set a trap, planning to let Mr. Brewster locate the Buddha, then snatch it from him.

Warned of the plot, Biff sets out to prevent his father from unwittingly leading the Reds to the legendary phantom caravan which—if it exists—supposedly guards the sacred statue.

The color, the violence and mystery of the Forbidden Land are revealed to Biff as he and his Tibetan companion, Taz Norkay, push deeper and deeper into its uncharted trails. Beset by enemies, befriended by strange monks, Biff and Taz finally are confronted by an aged "specter" whose magnetic, hypnotic eyes radiate unfathomable strength.

Biff's success—his tangible contribution to the cause of the Free World—concludes a thoroughly satisfying story of harrowing adventures high in the Himalayas.

BIFF BREWSTER MYSTERY ADVENTURES

BRAZILIAN GOLD MINE MYSTERY

MYSTERY OF THE CHINESE RING

HAWAIIAN SEA HUNT MYSTERY

MYSTERY OF THE MEXICAN TREASURE

AFRICAN IVORY MYSTERY

ALASKA GHOST GLACIER MYSTERY

MYSTERY OF THE AMBUSH IN INDIA

MYSTERY OF THE CARIBBEAN PEARLS

EGYPTIAN SCARAB MYSTERY

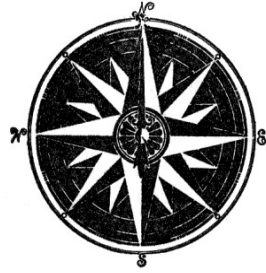
MYSTERY OF THE TIBETAN CARAVAN

BRITISH SPY RING MYSTERY

MYSTERY OF THE ARABIAN STALLION

MYSTERY OF THE ALPINE PASS

A BIFF BREWSTER MYSTERY ADVENTURE



MYSTERY
OF THE
TIBETAN
CARAVAN

By ANDY ADAMS

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Mystery of the Tibetan Caravan

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The camel's stern lurched skyward

CHAPTER I

Operation Yak Cheese

“AH Dach Ahhhhhhhhhh!”

“Ah Dach Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

The wild yells tore from the throats of two almond-eyed Bedouins squatting cross-legged at a campfire. As the moaning wind carried the echo back from the mountain slopes, sparks leaped high, danced off toward the sky, and flickering shadows played on then-drunken faces.

“Ah Dach Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!” The howl rose again as they passed a dripping flagon from one to the other, across the motionless forms of two other nomads sprawled in drugged sleep beside the fire.

The tethered ponies whinnied uneasily in the gloom, and the shaggy pack animal shook its horns and stared dumbly at its masters.

Crouched behind a boulder, Biff Brewster shivered and asked himself the old, familiar question, the question he had asked in Alaska, lost in an ice fog—in

Africa, three feet from a weaving cobra—in Mexico, Brazil, Hawaii . . .

“How do I get myself into these jams?”

He licked his dry lips and leaned close to a form lying beside him in the darkness. “What did you call these characters, Taz?” he whispered.

“Khambas,” answered a soft voice. “Fiercest tribe in Tibet.”

“Gangsters, huh?”

“Is that American for bandits?” asked the voice.

“That’s Chicago for bandits,” Biff answered.

“I see,” the voice said seriously. “I must remember.”

“This is no time to enlarge your vocabulary,” Biff drawled.

“Ah Dach Ahhhhhhhhhhhhh!” rose the howl again.

Biff stared out at the yellow faces, at the wickedly curved knives dangling from the bandits’ belts, but always his eyes returned to the two greasy leather bags slung across the saddle of the bisonlike pack animal.

“Are you sure that’s cheese in those leather bags?” he whispered.

“Yak cheese,” came the answer.

“Is that the yak that gave the milk for the stuff?”

“I suppose.”

Biff studied the fiercely curved horns, the sharp hoofs, the brooding gaze of the shaggy beast.

“What do they milk her with, a club?” he asked.

He heard his companion chuckle softly. “She only appears fierce,” came the answer.

“Well, she’s got me fooled,” Biff said. “Taz,” he went on, “as a Tibetan, you ought to know. We’re in our second day without food. We’ve been lying here for five hours waiting for those hoods to pass out so we can, uh—liberate those two bags. Just for old skeptical Biff from Indiana, how do you *know* that’s cheese in those bags?”

“Because those bags are trail churns,” his companion answered.

“Huh?” said Biff.

“The milk is put in there and churned as the yak walks,” said Taz. “Eventually, there is cheese.”

Biff looked at the filthy bags.

“*How* eventually?” he asked.

“Oh, not long. A few weeks.”

“Ulp,” said Biff weakly. He studied the figures at the fire—the bushy fur hats, the long, robelike wool garments, the felt boots, the contorted faces.

“What would they do if they caught us?” he asked.

“Well,” said Taz. “They are Khambas.”

“So?”

“They have a—a certain reputation.”

“For what?” Biff glanced at the knives again. “Fancy throat cutting?”

“No.” There was a pause. “Making cripples, for sale as slaves.”

Biff stared into the darkness. “Slaves? Who would want a crippled slave?”

“The beggar owners of India,” came the

reply."Crippled beggars arouse sympathy. They bring in much in alms for their owners."

Biff stared across the barren plateau and felt his heart begin to beat in his throat. "Look, Taz," he croaked, "do you still think we ought to go through with this operation yak cheese?"

There was a deep sigh from the darkness, and then a strange phrase: "Om *mani padme hum*."

"What's that again?"

" 'The jewel is in the lotus flower, amen,' " came the translation. "It's a Tibetan prayer."

"Which means—?" Biff sighed.

"Salvation is found only in true faith."

"Eeeeeeeee Yah Eeeeeeeee!" came a howl from beyond the rock.

"They're changing key," Biff drawled. "Your turn to look."

The form beside him stirred and rose cautiously from the shadows. Biff glanced up at the rather flat-topped head that poked itself over the boulder. The head had a thatch of fine, black hair that was ruffled by the night wind. The nose was small, the eyes indented and semi-Oriental, the body short and wiry. Biff rolled the name over a couple of times. Tazling Norkay. Of course it had long since been shortened to Taz. Long since? Biff sat up straight. Just seven days ago! In fact, just seven days ago *tonight!*

"Pardon?" he heard Tazling Norkay whisper from above him.

"It's my anniversary," Biff said. "Just one week ago tonight I was in Calcutta, India, with my folks—getting ready to sail home to the States. Look at me tonight—six hundred miles from Calcutta—and headed in the wrong direction!"

"Much has happened in that week," Tazling Norkay said quietly.

"You can say that again," Biff replied, letting his head fall back wearily against the boulder. He stared up at the star-spangled sky, looked to where the pale moon was slowly disappearing behind the mountain. He filled his lungs with the thin air of the high plateau, closed his eyes, and slowly his mind began to drift back over the incredible events of the past seven days . . .

He was back in Calcutta at the Royal Arms Hotel with his mother and his twin brother and sister, Ted and Monica, who had flown over from the States to meet Biff and his father after the *Ambush In India* adventure. The plan was for the entire family to sail back to the United States together on the liner, *Empire Queen*. It was a fine plan, conceived by Biff's mother, so the Brewsters could get to know each other again following the long absence of Biff and his father on two foreign mining assignments in quick succession.

Tom Brewster was all for it. He was tired, he said, of exotic mailing addresses. He assured Biff's mother that he wanted nothing better than to be back home again in Indiana.

Yet just three hours later, the whole, wonderful plan was tossed out the window!

A call had come to Mr. Brewster from Justin McDaniel, of the U. S. Embassy. There was a long discussion behind closed doors, and when Tom Brewster emerged to face his family, he announced that he would not be returning to the States with them after all. A sudden, emergency assignment had arisen—an assignment to do some special work in Nepal.

Biff took it for granted that he would accompany his father on this trip, but there was a strange moment of fatherly reluctance—not like Tom Brewster, who usually was eager for his son to be with him on his journeys to strange lands. But when Mrs. Brewster began to ask probing questions about the special work in Nepal, Tom Brewster had mumbled something about oil prospecting, changed the subject, and insisted that he was only teasing and of course Biff could go with him.

Thus the first step was taken which had led to this spot behind the boulder on a plateau in Tibet. Mrs. Brewster and the twins had boarded the *Empire Queen* for America, and the next morning, Biff and his father were winging north on an All-India Airlines Viscount Viking for Katmandu, capital of Nepal.

As they passed over the last green traces of the dense, malarial jungle which separates India from Nepal, the air began to lose its mugginess and grow clearer. The thick clouds dissolved, and suddenly,

straight ahead in the bright blue sky, rose the most impressive, breath-taking barrier of towering stone that Biff had ever seen—the most gigantic chain of mountains on the face of the earth—the Himalayas!

Tom Brewster explained to Biff that this great range sprawled for fifteen hundred miles across the heart of Asia. Out of this range rose the thirty highest mountain peaks in the world! The names of the peaks rolled off his tongue with great relish, for he was an amateur mountain climber and member of Alpinists clubs on three continents.

“Everest, Annapurna, K-2, Kanchenjunga, Makalu, Cho Oyu, Karanse—ah, there’s a mountain”—his father had sighed—“Karanse. Never scaled.”

Then Biff had said, “And beyond the mountains—Tibet. I guess very few people get into Tibet these days,” he added.

He looked over at his father, who was staring ahead toward the haze beyond the mountains.

“Very few—very, very few,” Mr. Brewster murmured, and glancing up at the seat belt sign, added hastily, “Buckle ’em up. We’re getting ready to land.”

Because their seats were in the ship’s tail, Biff and Mr. Brewster were nearly the last passengers off the huge prop-jet. Most of their fellow travelers had joined small knots of relatives and friends who had come to greet them. In fact, there was only one man left at the passenger gate who still seemed to be looking for someone. He was a mahogany-hued man with black

hair, a lithe figure, and dark eyes with small wrinkles at the corners.

Mr. Brewster glanced at the man with no apparent interest, then reached into his pocket and took out some baggage checks.

“Go pick up our luggage, will you, son?” he said. “I’ll meet you inside.”

Biff grabbed the checks and hurried toward a sign marked “Baggage” in four languages. It was at the baggage counter that he kept up his record for seeing familiar faces in exotic airports.

This man would have stood out not only in any airport, but in any gathering in the world. In this crowd of women in silk saris, Gurkhas in colorful turbans, barefooted Red Caps, linen-suited Indian merchants, the very tall, very thin man—in whipcords, long-billed flyer’s cap, and sun glasses—stood out like the Statue of Liberty.

“Shake Lakum!” Biff yelled.

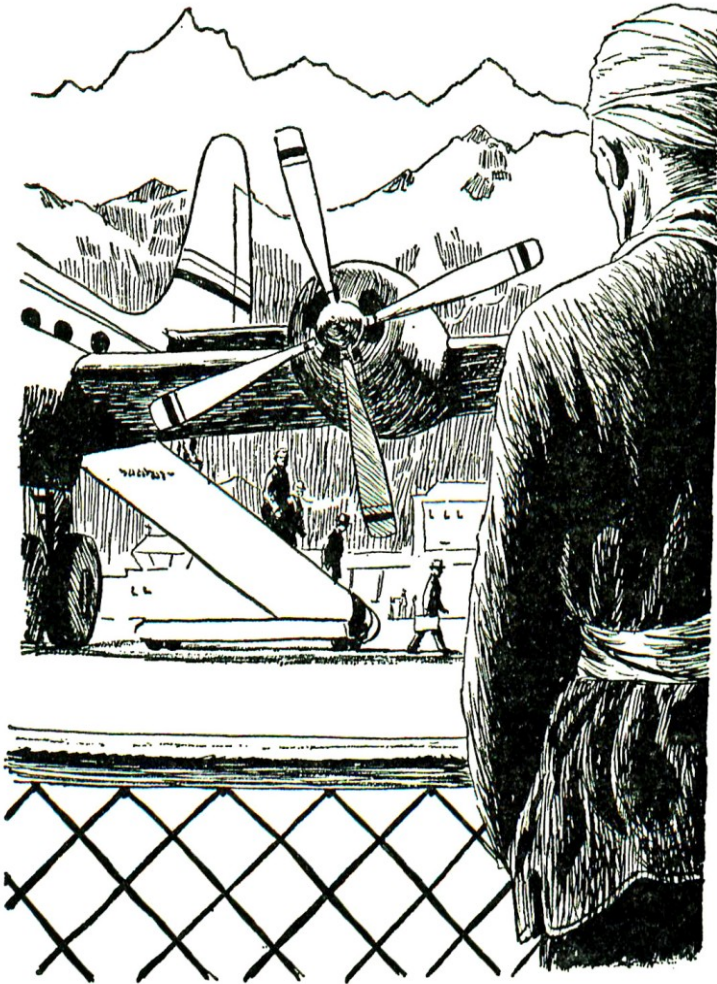
The thin man was asking something of the Parsee at the baggage and express counter. When he heard his name called, he snapped his head around:

“Biff Brewster!”

He pushed his way through the crowd to where Biff was standing.

“Biff!” he shouted. “What are you doing in this steam-heated part of the world?”

“You old bush pilot, you!” Biff laughed, pumping the tall man’s hand. “What are you doing so far from that



There was only one man left at the passenger gate

deep freeze you call Alaska?”

“Flying for Amer-India Oil!” said the lanky man. “Worked for ’em in Alaska, and they hired me to come over here with them because they needed someone who knows how to feel his way around these parts.”

“Oil prospecting! Why, that’s what Dad’s here for!” Biff announced.

“Well, whaddya know!” Shake Lakum laughed. He slapped Biff’s back, and the two began reminiscing about the good times they had had while solving the *Alaska Ghost Glacier Mystery* many months before. The bush pilot was the most skillful small-plane pilot Biff had ever flown with. He could set his pet, single-engine plane, the *Williwaw*, down on anything in Alaska from gravel bars to volcano craters.

“I don’t suppose you were able to bring the *Williwaw* with you, were you, Shake?” asked Biff.

“You kidding? Don’t suppose I’d trust myself in any other ship, do you?” Shake Lakum grinned. “Brought her over in a crate. Only right now, I’m slightly grounded for want of a super-charger part I ordered from the States. In fact, that’s why I’m here—to see if it’s come yet!”

They edged their way up to the counter where the counter man took their checks and returned with Biff’s bags and a carton for Shake Lakum.

“Well, now I can start operatin’,” said the lanky flyer. “Haven’t been able to really go-go-go up around those hills yonder.”

“Come on over and say hello to Dad,” Biff said. “He’s around here somewhere.”

Even as he said it, he caught sight of his father walking across the terminal. To Biff’s surprise, Mr. Brewster was with the mahogany-hued man they had seen waiting at the gate. They were deep in conversation.

“If Dad’s here to do some oil prospecting, that must be one of the oil company men,” Biff said. “In that case, you may know him, Shake.”

Shake raised his dark glasses and peered at the lithe man with the catlike walk.

“Nope—sure don’t,” said the bush pilot. “You say he’s with the Amer-India Oil?”

“No, I just assumed it,” Biff said. “I wonder who he is.”

“He’s a Sherpa for one thing,” Shake said.

“A Sherpa?” Biff asked. “What’s that?”

“They’re mountain climbers,” said Shake. “All the big mountain-climbing expeditions use ’em as guides. I think they’re from a tribe that originally came from Tibet—but they all live here in Nepal now.”

At this moment, Tom Brewster saw Shake, and did a double take. As they met in the center of the terminal, there was a hearty reunion between the two men who had shared so many adventures with Biff in Alaska.

“I understand we may be working together,” Shake said.

“Beg pardon?” said Tom Brewster.

“I’m with Amer-India.” Shake grinned. “Biff tells me you’re here in Katmandu to do some oil prospecting.”

“Oh,” said Tom Brewster, with a trace of confusion in his voice. “Oh, yes, of course.” Suddenly, he remembered he had not introduced them to the dark-eyed man with whom he had been walking. During their reunion, the wiry man had been standing slightly aside.

“This is Izling Norkay,” said Mr. Brewster. “He—he, uh—was good enough to come to meet us.”

It seemed a strange introduction. Biff had thought his father was going to further identify the man, but he let the introduction go at that.

Biff shook Izling Norkay’s small hand and liked his wide-mouthed smile.

“Mr. Norkay has a jeep outside,” said Tom Brewster. “Will you bring the luggage, Biff?” The husky engineer paused and then, looking at Shake Lakum, added, “And I’ll be seeing lots of you, I’m sure, Shake.”

With that, Tom Brewster and Izling Norkay turned and strode toward the vehicle exit of the airport.

Shake Lakum looked at Biff and grinned. “You sure your ol’ dad’s not keepin’ somethin’ from you, Biff?” he asked, following the two men with his keen gaze.

“Why do you ask?” Biff inquired.

“Because that Sherpa is not with the Amer-India Oil Company, I know,” said Shake. “And I never saw a Sherpa yet who wanted to do anything but climb

mountains.”

“But why would Dad say we were here to look for oil if we were coming to climb mountains?” Biff asked.

“That’s your problem.” Shake grinned.

CHAPTER II

Mountains or Oil?

SHAKE said good-by, telling Biff to be sure and look him up when he got settled, and hurried off toward the hangar where the *Williwaw* was quartered.

Biff picked up the baggage and followed after his father and Izling Norkay, who were walking along the concrete apron adjacent to the terminal parking lot.

As Biff puffed to a stop beside the men, Izling Norkay smiled at him and said, "A few days in the peaks would cure that, my boy."

"I need *something* to get back in shape." Biff grinned.

"Perhaps my son could help you find something to amuse you while you are here," the brown-skinned man said. He turned toward the parking lot, and raising his arm, called, "Tazling—come at once, please!"

A boy with the same dark, silky hair, deep brown eyes, and wiry figure as his father vaulted from the

driver's seat of a jeep and trotted toward them. Biff was gratified to see that the boy was about his own age.

This was Taz.

After introductions all around, Mr. Brewster said, "Biff, Mr. Norkay and I have some business to take care of. Why don't you and Tazling take a cab to the Victoria Hotel where we have reservations? We'll take the jeep and join you later."

"Okay, Dad," Biff agreed. "Mountain climbing or oil—whichever it is, Dad's sure grim about it," he mused, as he watched his father walk away. Then Biff and Taz Norkay, luggage in hand, hurried up the platform toward an ancient, high-topped taxi which had just rolled up to the curb.

Behind the wheel sat a dark-skinned man wearing a black chauffeur's cap and a lop-shouldered coat from an old chalk-striped suit.

Taz apparently did not see the passenger already seated in the back of the cab, and jerked the rear door open before Biff could stop him.

"No—sorry," said the driver.

Leaning down to look at the cab's passenger, Biff said, "Sorry, sir—we didn't notice the cab was occupied."

"That is quite all right," said the man in the rear seat. He was gaunt-faced with a jaundiced complexion. His lips were thick, his eyes oversized and bulging. His mustache was so limp it seemed almost painted on.

“Please share the cab with me—Biff Brewster.”

Biff was stunned. He couldn’t think of anyone in Nepal who could possibly know his name.

“Have—have we met, sir?” he asked.

“Get in, and I’ll explain.” The man smiled, revealing brown-stained teeth. To the driver, he said, “Get their luggage, Suvaji.”

The cab driver leaped from his seat, grabbed the luggage from the surprised boys, and bowed them into the cab.

As the door slammed behind them, Biff took a closer look at the passenger to see if there was anything about him he recognized.

“No, you don’t know me.” The man smiled. “I am Farid Hamil. You are Biff Brewster.” He leaned forward, and looking across Biff’s chest, added, “And this is Tazling, the son of the famous Sherpa climber, Izling Norkay—correct?”

Tazling nodded dumbly, as amazed as Biff had been.

“Oh, come, come, boys.” The gaunt man laughed, lighting a brown-paper cigarette. “Knowing your names isn’t black magic. After all, both your fathers are famous men.”

“But Dad’s only famous in scientific circles,” Biff said.

“And you are going to tell me he is in Nepal on a scientific mission, I suppose?” Farid Hamil smiled.

“Oil prospecting—yes,” Biff said.

“Ha! Very clever,” snorted Farid Hamil. “But it would have been more credible had your father not been met by so famous a mountaineer as Izling Nor-kay, who has led expeditions up Everest, Annapurna, and K-2—and who has *never* seen an oil well in his life!”

Biff glanced over at Taz, but the Sherpa boy said nothing. “If he’s not here for oil prospecting, why is Dad in Nepal?” Biff asked finally.

“To climb Mt. Karanse, of course,” purred the gaunt man.

“To climb Mt. Karanse?” Biff repeated, beginning to feel irritated. “What makes you think so?”

“Because I have been planning, in company with another group, to climb this mountain for some time, and I keep abreast of possible competition. If your father goes up the slopes, he might ruin the trail for the entire season. He could set off avalanches which would make the slopes impassable for weeks. However,”—the man paused, blew a plume of smoke toward the cab roof—“however, we are not unreasonable. If he wishes to combine climbing parties, we are willing to discuss it. It may be to our mutual advantage.”

Biff stared out the window of the speeding cab. He wondered why this man had not contacted his father back at the airport—but before he could ask the question, Farid Hamil anticipated him.

“I was sorry to miss your distinguished father at the

airport, so I trust you will pass on my proposition to him.”

“I will mention it to Dad,” Biff said. “But I’d suggest you come see him yourself, Mr. Hamil.”

“Splendid suggestion,” Farid Hamil said. “I’ll try to do so later this evening.” He flicked his cigarette out the window, as the cab pulled up before a baroque structure coated with sandstone gingerbread.

“Here is your hotel, I believe,” said Farid Hamil. “Help them with their bags, Suvaji,” he added.

Not until they were standing in front of the Victoria Hotel, their luggage piled around them and the cab pulling away into the traffic, did it occur to Biff that he had never mentioned their destination to either Farid Hamil or the driver he had called Suvaji. Yet they had been driven unerringly to the right hotel.

The two-room suite assigned the Brewsters was high ceilinged with furniture and appointments reminiscent of the age of British colonial glory and the years when Nepal had furnished the British armies with thousands of tough Gurkha warriors. The walls bore pictures of the turbaned soldiers of that flamboyant era, posed beside their horses.

But Biff gave them only a cursory glance. His mind was still on the curious experience in the cab.. As the bellhop bowed from the room with the prayerful gesture so common in this part of the world, Biff turned to the Sherpa boy, who was studying the colorful surroundings.

"Tell me something, Taz—" Biff stopped, suddenly remembering his father's advice to resist the American custom of nicknaming on sight. "Do you mind if I call you Taz?" he asked.

"Not at all." The boy smiled. "What is it you say in America? 'Call me anything—except late for supper'?"

"No kidding," continued Biff, when he had finished laughing, "did your father mention anything about oil prospecting with my dad?"

"No," said Taz Norkay. "Nothing."

"Did he say anything about climbing Mt. Karanse?"

"Nothing," said Taz. "This takes much preparation. My father has made no such preparation."

"Has he said *anything*?"

"Nothing," said Taz. "But after hearing from Calcutta, he began to study his maps of passes in the border area around Musarri . . ."

"Isn't that where the big peaks are?" Biff asked.

"Big peaks, yes," said Taz, "but not Karanse." He looked out the wide windows toward the vast Himalayan range. "Karanse is that way," he said, pointing east. "Musarri is straight north."

"Beats me," Biff murmured, walking to the window and staring into the busy street below. "Dad says oil, Mr. Hamil says Karanse, and you say passes in the Musarri area—that's three possibilities."

Biff started to turn away from the window when he spotted his father. The husky engineer was just rolling up to the curb in Izling Norkay's jeep. Mr. Brewster

slid out of the vehicle, said something to the Sherpa mountaineer, and walked toward the hotel entrance. Izling Norkay drove away.

"Well, I certainly didn't expect him so soon," Biff exclaimed. "But maybe now we can find out what this is all about."

A few minutes later, Tom Brewster strode through the door of the suite.

"Dad, I've got a question—" Biff began.

"Hold it a moment," said his father. He looked about the room, found the phone, and picked it up.

"Operator," he said, "I want to place a person-to-person call to Calcutta, India—to Mr. Justin McDaniel, at the United States Embassy. And would you hurry, please?"

Justin McDaniel, Biff recalled, was the man who had been responsible for this assignment.

Mr. Brewster lowered the phone and said, "Yes, son—what is it?"

"We rode here with a man who wanted to know our real reason for being in Nepal," Biff said.

"Our real reason— Who was this man?" Mr. Brewster snapped.

Biff told him briefly about their meeting with Farid Hamil.

"Farid Hamil—yes, operator?"

The boys could hear the operator's words plainly.

"I am unable to complete your call, *sahr*—the line is down somewhere between Katmandu and Calcutta."

“Do you have any idea when it will be repaired?” asked Tom Brewster. “My call is very important.”

“Sorry, *sahr*. It appears to be an act of vandalism,” said the operator’s voice. “The phone company reports much damage to the line in three places.”

“I see,” said Tom Brewster, a thoughtful look in his eyes. “Thank you, operator. Ring me when you can get the call through.”

He lowered the phone slowly to its cradle and seemed wrapped in thought.

Biff took a deep breath. “Dad,” he said, “are we in Nepal to do oil prospecting—really?”

His father shook his head slowly.

“To climb Mt. Karanse?”

Again Tom Brewster shook his head.

“Can you *tell* us the real reason?”

“Yes, son,” said Tom Brewster, “I think it’s *high* time you *both* knew the real reason why we have come to Nepal.”

CHAPTER III

Truth and Consequences

THE wind whistled across the Tibetan plateau. New yells rose from the Khamba campfire, but Biff, mentally, was back in the hotel room in Katmandu, waiting to hear his father explain what they were doing in Nepal.

“ . . . I don’t know exactly where to begin,” Tom Brewster started.

“Sir,” said Taz Norkay, “may I inquire about my father first?”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” said Mr. Brewster. “He has gone to get some new maps.”

Taz Norkay’s eyes widened. “But what happened to *his* maps?”

“Stolen while you and he were at the airport meeting us,” said Tom Brewster. “That’s what brought me back here so soon, for which I am glad, in light of this Farid Hamil thing.”

“You mean you think the two are tied in?” asked

Biff.

"I'm afraid so," said Mr. Brewster. Then with a dry smile, he added, "Biff, I'm sorry it was necessary to concoct the story about oil prospecting."

Biff grinned back. "Well, it was a coincidence that there *is* a company here doing oil prospecting."

"It was *no* coincidence," said Tom Brewster. "That's why oil prospecting was used as a cover."

"Did you know Shake Lakum was here?"

"No. That was a coincidence," said Tom Brewster, "and it almost threw me!"

"Was the oil story for Mom's benefit?" Biff asked.

Tom Brewster nodded and smiled gently. He walked to the east window of the room overlooking the small hotel garden. It was alive with palms, ferns, orchids, and thick-leaved tropical plants. The soft trills of strange birds rose to their ears.

Tom Brewster stared toward the sound for a moment, then said, "What I'd give to hear a good old bob white whistle right now!"

Biff knew that mention of his mother had reminded his father of home and the broad fields in which they had so often hunted the elusive little quail.

"Are there bobwhite quail in Nepal?" Biff asked.

"I don't know—I doubt it," his father said, still staring into the garden below.

"But as you were saying, Dad," Biff reminded him, "it's not oil, it's not Karanse. What is it?"

Tom Brewster turned and walked to the French

windows looking out on the snow-capped Himalayas. He beckoned to the boys to join him.

“Beyond those mountains,” said the engineer, pointing toward the hazy land beyond the farthest peaks, “lies the highest and, perhaps, the strangest country in the whole world.” Then, with an apologetic look at Taz, he added, “Strange by western standards, of course.” Tom Brewster tapped his pipe against his palm and, as he filled it, he continued, “Tibet is a country whose laws, customs, and entire culture have been controlled for centuries by a vast organization of monks called Lamas. These Lamas are believed by the Tibetan people to be reincarnated—reborn—saints and scholars. Rebirth is one of the most important tenets of the Buddhist faith. Lamaism is a sect of the Buddhist faith much as Baptists and Methodists are sects of the Christian faith.”

“Don’t the Tibetans place more emphasis on reincarnation than other Buddhists do?” Biff queried.

“Yes. And this conviction that the soul, at death, moves on to another body—any body—has a profound effect on the whole structure of Tibetan life. The Lamas I mentioned, who are believed to be the reincarnations of Buddhist saints and scholars of ages past, are the chief policy makers of Tibet. And the highest Lama, the most holy Lama in all Tibet, is the Dalai Lama.”

“And when the old Dalai Lama dies,” Biff chimed in, “they search for a baby to whose body they believe the

dead one's soul has fled, and they make *him* the new Dalai Lama."

Tom Brewster nodded. "At one time," he continued, "the Dalai Lama's word was law in Tibet. But as you know, the Communists invaded the country. The Dalai Lama was forced to flee from his palace in Lhasa. He did it under cover of a sandstorm, and he took with him the most sacred symbol of Lamaism in Tibet, the Golden Buddha."

"The *Glowing* Buddha!" Taz whispered in awe.

Biff realized the golden symbol must have special significance for the Sherpa boy.

"I see you know of it," Tom Brewster said, glancing at Taz. "The golden statue of Buddha is supposed to glow in the presence of the true Dalai Lama. Thus, it is the one perfect test for identifying the Dalai Lama. You can understand why the present Dalai Lama would be anxious to protect this statue at all costs."

"What did he do?" Taz asked.

"When the Dalai Lama fled Lhasa, he split his party into two sections," Tom Brewster said. "He figured the pursuing Communist soldiers would never think the Dalai Lama would allow the Golden Buddha out of his hands. So, taking a long chance, he gave the statue to a trusted aide whose caravan headed west, toward a little known pass in the Himalayas leading to Nepal. The Dalai Lama himself headed straight south, hoping to lure his pursuers in that direction so the other caravan could escape with the Golden Buddha."

“But the Communists didn’t fall for it?” Biff asked.

“No,” answered Mr. Brewster. “The Dalai Lama escaped into India. But the other caravan and the Golden Buddha disappeared into western Tibet and were never seen again.” The engineer puffed on his pipe, and added, “At least, not by any reliable observers.”

Biff detected meaning in the remark. “How about unreliable ones?” he asked.

Tom Brewster smiled at his son. “That’s just the point,” he said. “Nomad sheep herders, lost travelers in central Tibet have reported sighting a strange caravan deep in the interior of Tibet. But the reports are hazy, fragmentary. Most of the time they hear it passing in the night. The few who declare they have seen it say that it fades and disappears when one watches too long—much like a mirage.”

“A phantom caravan,” Biff said softly.

“So it was believed to be until recently,” said Tom Brewster. “And so it still may be. I might add.” He took his pipe from his teeth and stared toward the desolate country far beyond the farthest range of then Himalayas. “But if it is *real*, it represents a danger to the free world.”

“I don’t understand,” said Biff.

“If the phantom caravan exists, then so does the Golden Buddha. If so, there is danger that it might fall into Communist hands one day—maybe any day.”

“And if it did?” Biff asked.

“The Communists could rig up the Golden Buddha to glow in a fake ceremony to name a puppet Dalai Lama—one who would do their bidding. The Tibetan people have resisted the Communist occupiers up to now because they believed their Dalai Lama was in exile in India. But if the Communists possessed the Golden Buddha and staged a really impressive ceremony, the Tibetan people might fall for it—they might accept the puppet and do whatever this new leader instructed them to do.”

“But why is that particularly important to the free world?” Biff asked.

“It is important because, through the exiled Dalai Lama, who is our friend, it has been learned that there are vast stores of minerals within Tibet which are vital to atomic and missile development. It is the world’s richest storehouse of these minerals. Up to now, the Tibetan people have kept the location of the ores a secret. But if the Communists should—”

Suddenly, Taz leaned forward. He was pointing toward the street below. “Mr. Brewster—Biff—Look! That man getting out of the taxicab!”

Biff stared across the street at the familiar shape of the ancient cab in which they had ridden from the airport. Just leaving it and walking toward the door of a small café across from the hotel, was—

“Farid Hamil!” Biff exclaimed.

Tom Brewster stepped closer to the window and stared at the gaunt man in the white silk suit and

Panama hat. The man paused to light one of his brown-paper cigarettes. Then he turned and looked up at the hotel.

The three at the window retreated instinctively. It looked as if Farid Hamil was looking right at their room!

"He knows so much else, he may know what *room* we're in," Biff muttered.

"You're sure this is the man who was so inquisitive about us?"

"Positive," said Biff. "Right, Taz?"

"Right," said Taz.

While they continued to watch, they noticed Izling Norkay's jeep returning. The lithe mountaineer started maneuvering his vehicle into a parking place.

Tom Brewster thought for a minute, then said, "Taz, I want you to take a note to your father for me." He walked to the desk, scribbled on a piece of notepaper, and handed it to Taz. "When you are through, come back here," he said.

"Yes, sir," said the Sherpa boy, and hurried from the room.

Biff and his father watched as Taz appeared in the street below. He leaned into the jeep, slipped the note into his father's hand, then turned and walked back into the hotel. Izling Norkay drove away.

During the exchange, Farid Hamil had drawn back deeper into the shadows of the doorway as though anxious to stay out of Izling Norkay's sight.

Tom Brewster watched the man awhile longer. Finally, he touched Biff's arm and said, "Keep your eye on him, son." Walking into the bedroom, the engineer removed his brief case from the closet, opened his valise, removed some things from it, and put them in the brief case. As he snapped it shut, Taz Norkay returned from his errand.

"Good work, boy," said Tom Brewster. "Now, I have another job for you."

"Yes, sir," said Taz Norkay.

"You know Katmandu well, I assume?" Mr. Brewster asked.

"Yes, sir, I was born here," Taz replied.

"You could lose somebody if need be?" Mr. Brewster asked, glancing toward the window.

"Oh, yes," said Taz Norkay. "I know some *alleys* he would be afraid to follow us through."

"Good," said Tom Brewster. "We are about to test Mr. Hamil's stalking skill."

"How about me, Dad?" Biff asked wistfully.

"You will watch from the window to see if he follows me," said Tom Brewster. "I'll call back shortly. I will ask you if we are having a guest for dinner. If he does follow me, say, 'Yes'—understand?"

"Sure, Dad," said Biff.

"Good," said Tom Brewster, squeezing his son's shoulder. Then he turned and walked from the room with Taz at his heels.

In a few minutes, Biff saw them appear on the street

below. He watched the gaunt figure in the doorway. When his father and Taz were halfway up the street, Farid Hamil strolled casually from his vantage point and fell in about a half block behind them. They disappeared around a corner.

Fifteen minutes later, the call came.

Biff grabbed the phone, said, "Hello," and heard his father's voice say, "Hello, son. Are we having that guest for dinner tonight?"

"Yes, sir—definitely," said Biff.

"Thank you, son." There was a pause, and then his father said, "*Auf Wiedersehen*."

Biff hung up, intrigued by the curious German "good-by." It was the first time his father had ever used the expression in addressing him. Biff's memory dredged up a definition he had once heard—"Auf Wiedersehen" meant not just "Good-by" but "till we meet again."

It was to be a long time indeed until Biff and his father met again.

CHAPTER IV

Long Gone

“BY GOLLY,” mumbled Biff to himself, “he never did finish the story of what we are doing in Nepal.”

It didn’t occur to Biff that his father might not soon return, so he paced the room restlessly, searching the busy street time after time, hoping for the sight of the familiar figure.

The minutes turned to hours. Biff began to feel hungry, but he didn’t want to leave the room for fear his father would call again or that the call from Calcutta would come through. So he ordered dinner served in the room.

“Funny,” he thought, “Dad didn’t say a thing about what I should tell Mr. McDaniel if he calls back.”

He devoured the meal, his eyes constantly straying to the mute telephone. When he finished eating, Biff resumed his pacing, his visits to the window. He began to have visions of his father and Taz lying dead in some dark, back alley of Katmandu and Farid Hamil

grinning down at them in fiendish delight.

No use trying to look for them. No use trying to find Izling Norkay's house, since he had no idea where it was. The man wasn't listed in the phone book, Biff had soon discovered; and even if he were, it didn't seem very wise to be wandering around the dark streets of Katmandu, Nepal, at—he glanced at the mantel clock—holy smoke!—10:45 P.M. And his dad had left just about dusk—about 7:30! Where was he? What was keeping him?

The phone rang.

Biff jumped as if stabbed and grabbed the receiver.

"Hello!" he almost shouted, poised expectantly for the sound of his father's voice.

"Hey, *cheechako*," a jovial voice on the other end chuckled, "you wanna bust ol' Shake's eardrum?"

"Oh, Shake," Biff said, trying to catch his breath. "I thought it was Dad. He's been gone quite a while."

"I called because I knew you didn't know where to reach me, and I was sure you'd be registered there," Shake Lakum explained. "Anything I can do?"

"Why don't you come on over, Shake?" Biff said. "I'd like to talk to you about something."

"Okay, Biff. You sound worried," said the bush pilot.

"I am—a little," Biff admitted. "How long will you be?"

"Just three minutes." Shake laughed. "I'm right downstairs. I had to come into town on business."

"Well, you son of a gun!" Biff laughed. "Get up here

pronto!" A few minutes later, Shake Lakum knocked on the door of the Brewster suite.

Biff had never been so happy to see another human being in his life. Before he knew it, he was pouring out the whole story to the lanky bush pilot. He ended by explaining how his father and Taz Norkay had left, with the oily Farid Hamil on their trail, and the silence since then. Biff walked to the window and pointed across the street to where Farid Hamil had stood spying on the hotel.

To his surprise, Biff saw a familiar-looking vehicle standing there. "Hey, that's the cab we rode in with Hamil from the airport," he said to Shake, pointing toward the old taxi.

Shake looked across at the cab and at the driver, whom Hamil had called Suvaji, lounging at the wheel. A funny grin spread across Shake's face.

"That's the hack there?" he asked.

"Yes—why?" Biff queried, noticing the smile.

"Well, ain't that interesting!" said Shake, scratching his head.

Biff snorted. "What's so interesting?"

"That's the guy that just drove me in from the airport, and while we were riding, I noticed something mighty peculiar. I didn't think it was any of my business then, but maybe it is now."

"You're still talking riddles," Biff said.

"Tell you what," said Shake. "I'll bet that bird could tell us plenty about this Farid Hamil, and I think I

know how we can worm it out of him.”

“How? I’m ready,” Biff said.

“Let’s tell the operator to hold all calls while we go down and have a little chat with our friend,” said Shake.

Biff picked up the phone, gave the necessary instructions to the hotel operator, and followed Shake out the door and through the lobby to the street.

“Good evening, gentlemen,” the cab driver sang out. “Ride again with Suvaji?”

“I see you remember me,” said Shake, as they approached the cab.

“Oh, yes—of course.” The driver grinned, ready to open the door.

“Him too?” Shake asked, pointing to Biff.

“Oh, yes—American boy,” said Suvaji.

“Some memory,” Shake said. “Then you probably remember the guy my friend rode in from the airport with?”

The driver’s face went blank. “No, sorry,” he said.

“How do you know?” Shake snapped. “I haven’t described him yet.”

“Suvaji no remember,” the driver insisted.

Shake was leaning on the hood of the old cab. He looked down at his hand. “No remember, eh? Well, maybe I can help you remember.” He reached down, and with a jerk, raised the hood, exposing the cab’s engine.

To Biff’s amazement, there was exposed not a

wheezy old grease-caked gas burner, but a gleaming, powerful engine whose bulk filled the entire space beneath the hood. On it in shiny letters was the word, JAGUAR.

“A Jag engine in a car older than Henry Ford!” Shake exclaimed. “Now, ain’t that interestin’?”

The cab driver, Suvaji, was gasping with indignation and trying to push the hood down. Shake held it firm for a moment, then let it slam shut.

“I live by the sound of engines.” The bush pilot grinned. “And I could tell that sports car purr didn’t go with that tin lizzie chassis.”

Biff looked at the driver, who was glaring at Shake. “But, so what?” said Biff.

“There have been several robberies in Katmandu lately—featuring some quick getaways by guys in a cab that could outrun any police car in town. Now, I’m not suggesting anything—maybe Suvaji here is a sports car buff or something—a motor lover, so to speak, eh, Suvaji?”

The cab driver grinned weakly, looking up and down the street as though fearful their conversation would be overheard.

“Don’t worry—I can keep a secret,” Shake Lakum said. “For a price.” He poked a finger at Suvaji. “Take off, you!” he growled. “And when you come back here at—nine o’clock in the morning, I want you to have some answers for this boy. Just who this Farid Hamil is, where he’s from, and what his game is. I’m sure

you've got friends who can fill you in on that kind of information." Shake waved his hand at him. "Now beat it and be back in the morning, or we have a little chat with the gendarmes about that Jag engine, savvy?"

The completely shaken Suvaji climbed into his cab, started the engine, and with a roar, went racing down the street.

"He'll dig up some dope on your pal Hamil, I'll betcha." Shake Lakum grinned. "Now, let's go back upstairs and see what we ought to do next!"

But upstairs it was just wait again. Wait for some word from Biff's father or word from Calcutta. But neither word came. When the clock read one o'clock, Biff suggested Shake stay the night since it didn't appear that his father's bed was going to be used.

The lanky bush pilot agreed. Attired in a pair of Tom Brewster's pajamas, which hit him at about the shins and elbows, he stretched out on one of the twin beds, and was soon snoring.

Biff looked at the clock for the hundredth time, and his last recollection was that it was 1:30 a.m.

His next look at the clock showed it to read 6 A.M. Light was streaming through the windows, and a strange combination of sounds filled the room. Half of the sound Biff recognized as snoring. The other half was the jangle of the telephone.

Biff leaped from the bed and ran into the living room. This call, he knew, had to be from either his father or Calcutta.

“Calcutta calling Mr. Thomas Brewster,” said a faraway voice when he lifted the receiver.

“He’s not here. This is his son, Biff. Can I take the message?” Biff inquired.

A voice on the other end informed the operator he would talk to Biff, and in the next moment, he heard the voice say, “Biff, this is Justin McDaniel. Did I hear you say your father is out? At this time of the morning? Where is he, do you know?”

“No, sir, I don’t,” Biff answered.

“Well, find out, son,” Justin McDaniel insisted. “Contact him at once and tell him that he is not, under any circumstances, to go any further with his mission to—” here the diplomat caught himself—“with his mission,” he repeated.

“Into Tibet, you mean?” asked Biff quietly.

There was a startled pause at the other end. “Then you’ve already learned you are not in Nepal for oil prospecting.”

“Yes, sir,” Biff said, turning to look at Shake teetering sleepily in the door of the bedroom.

“So, unfortunately, did some other people,” said Justin McDaniel, “people who are in a position to do your father great harm should he attempt to carry out this mission—”

At that moment Biff heard a loud knocking at the door of the suite.

“Hold it just a minute, Mr. McDaniel,” Biff said. He looked at Shake and nodded toward the sound. The

lanky pilot strode across the room, opened the door, and was almost knocked down by a figure which brushed by him and ran over to Biff.

It was Taz Norkay with a frightened look on his face.

“Biff,” he said. “They’ve gone! Both our fathers have gone!”

CHAPTER V

The Search Starts

TAZ NORKAY was holding out a sheet of paper toward Biff.

"Mr. Brewster and I shook Farid Hamil and went to my house," Taz explained. "I left our fathers talking together and went to bed. When I awoke this morning, they were gone—and they left this note for you. I read it," said Taz.

Biff looked at it dumbly. "*Biff,*" he read in his father's handwriting, "*I could not come back to explain—the attached note for Air. McDaniel will reveal why.*"

Biff's eyes leaped ahead to a message addressed to Justin McDaniel. "Sir," he said, into the phone, "I'll read you the note Dad left for you."

"*Dear Justin,*" said the note, "*Shortly after arriving here, Izling Norkay's maps showing the Himalayan passes were stolen. A man named Farid Hamil has been snooping around, quizzing Biff, and trailing me. I think*

he knows why we are in Nepal, but seeks details such as time and place. Before he can learn this, we have decided to embark on the mission. Would you be kind enough to provide Biff with whatever aid he needs and wish us hick on Operation Caravan?"

There was a small sigh of despair at the other end of the line.

"Operation Caravan," Biff repeated. "Meaning they're on their way to try and find the phantom caravan and the Golden Buddha!"

"I'm afraid so," Justin McDaniel said solemnly. "Exactly what they tricked him into doing."

"They? Who are they?" Biff asked.

"The Communists. They learned of our plan for Operation Caravan through their spies only hours after we conceived it. By the time our counterespionage had discovered this, they had sent an agent there to trick your father into leaving on his mission before we could warn him against going. To keep us from warning him, they sabotaged the phone lines between Calcutta and Katmandu."

"That's why you couldn't call each other last night!" Biff exclaimed.

"Exactly," said the diplomat.

"And while the line was down, their agent started acting clumsy all over the place so Dad would panic and take off before the agent could learn any details about the mission."

"Precisely," said Justin McDaniel.

“And the agent, of course, is—”

“Farid Hamil,” finished Justin McDaniel.

Biff sighed. “So now Dad and Izling Norkay are somewhere between here and Tibet, on their way to look for a phantom caravan that could be anywhere.”

“Or nowhere,” added Justin McDaniel.

“Tell me something, Mr. McDaniel,” Biff said a little bitterly. “Why Dad? Why is he in on this?”

“Because he is a skilled mountain climber, because he has the scientific knowledge to evaluate information about the ore deposits he spoke of—but most important of all, because he was here.”

There was little else to say. Mr. McDaniel said he would see what could be done about getting help to Mr. Brewster from within Tibet. Biff explained to Justin McDaniel about Shake Lakum’s presence and assured him that the pilot, an old friend, would look out for his needs.

“I’ll be in touch with you,” said the diplomat.

“Thank you, sir,” said Biff, and hung up.

He stared out the window toward the hazy land beyond the mountains. “If only there was some way . . .” His voice trailed off, and he looked over at Shake Lakum, who had climbed into his clothes while Biff was on the phone.

“Every time we meet, I seem to be hip deep in problems,” Biff said dryly.

“Yeah, well, don’t get in over your head on this one, Biff boy,” Shake said. “If you’re lookin’ for a league

where they play dirty, those Commies are league leaders.”

“But to let Dad walk right into a trap that way—” Biff began.

“I know—I know,” Shake said. “But don’t underestimate your dear ol’ dad. Besides—if you’ll take a look out that window, you’ll see an awful lot of real estate. And they could be anywhere in any part of that as far as your eye can see.”

“Not so,” said a small voice behind them.

Biff and Shake spun around. Taz was staring out toward the far mountains.

“What do you mean?” Biff asked.

“I mean there are only a few passes through the Himalayas into Tibet.”

“How many?” Biff asked.

“Seven within reasonable distance from here,” said the Sherpa boy.

“Seven!” Biff growled. “It might as well be a hundred.”

“But Father had marked only three of those seven on his maps.”

“Well, now, that’s better,” said Biff.

“Who says so?” Shake interrupted. “The Commies stole those maps he had marked. So they know the three passes he had in mind.”

“If father intended to use one of the three he marked, he would not change,” Taz said blandly.

“How come?” Biff asked.

"Because they are the quickest routes into Tibet," said Taz.

"Isn't there *one* quickest route?" Shake asked.

"Not for all times of year and all weather conditions," said Taz. "One would observe the weather at the last minute, then make a dash for the pass which fitted conditions best."

"But won't the Commies be waiting at all passes?" asked Biff.

"My father is very skillful in the mountains," said Taz.

"I don't think he will have to be," Shake said. "I believe they'll let him through—that's why they tricked him into going—because they want him inside Tibet."

"But once inside Tibet, no telling what might happen to them," Biff said. "The Commies would surely catch them and—" He stopped gloomily.

"If we were going to try and warn them, it has to be done before they get *into* Tibet," said Taz.

"You mean you think you could figure out where to start looking?" Biff asked enthusiastically.

"I believe so," said Taz. "If we could get to Musarri, a village on the border, and ask questions, I am sure we could find some trace of them. I believe they left for the border about three this morning. I think I heard the jeep start up then, and at the time, I thought I was dreaming."

Biff looked at his watch. Seven o'clock.

“Gee—but a four-hour start. Five hours by the time we could get organized,” he said dolefully.

“There is one way we could make up much ground between here and Musarri,” said the Sherpa boy, glancing at Shake Lakum.

Biff followed his gaze and began to grin.

“Don’t look at *me*, you two nuts!” snorted Shake Lakum. “Why, they’d revoke my flying license if I aided and abetted a hair-brained scheme like that!”

“True,” said Biff.

“Why, you don’t know what kind of trap those Reds have set for your dads, and it sure wouldn’t do any good for you two to jump into it with them!”

“True,” said Biff.

“You’ve got one chance in a thousand of locating them—maybe one in a million of catching them.”

“You’re so right,” said Biff.

By now, Taz’s gaze was switching from Biff to Shake and back to Biff again.

“And that border is so hazy you might wander into Tibet before you knew it. The Commies could blow that up into an incident—trespassing by imperialistic interlopers. Why, they’d expand it into a full-scale invasion before they were through. And don’t think your friend McDaniel at the U. S. Embassy wouldn’t pop a gasket about that one . . .”

“True,” said Biff.

“So my advice to you two characters—”

“Yes?” said Biff expectantly.

“—is to get your flyin’ clothes on and let’s get after your dads before they get any more of a lead on us!”

“Aha, I knew it!” Biff howled, slapping Taz on the back. “I remember from Alaska. Just before jumping in the icy water, ol’ Shake tells you all the reasons why he shouldn’t!”

“But now, let me tell you somethin’,” Shake added, waving his finger at the two boys. “This chase is gonna be on my terms—my way, understand?”

“Sure—what’s your way?” Biff asked with a grin.

“I’ll tell you on the way to the airport, and don’t gimme that look like you’ll swing me around to doin’ it *your* way before we’re through!” Shake said, swiping playfully at Biff’s jaw.

Biff dashed into the bedroom to dress, shouting behind him, “My way? I don’t have any way yet—all I know is we’ve got to do something.”

He climbed into a pair of chino pants, a wool shirt for flying altitudes, some high-top shoes, and a nylon jacket.

Five minutes later, the three strode through the lobby of the Victoria Hotel and into the street. Almost as if on cue, Suvaji’s ancient taxicab pulled up.

“Taxi, please?” he called to the triumvirate.

“Well, look who’s here,” said Shake Lakum, from the corner of his mouth. “Wonder if he’s put the finger on Farid Hamil for us.”

“Except that we don’t need the info now,” Biff murmured.

“Let’s see what he says, anyway,” Shake answered, leading the way to the old taxicab. “Airport, Suvaji,” he said.

Suvaji jumped into the driver’s seat, rammed the engine into gear, and they raced off into the traffic.

“Well, Suvaji—what’d you find out for us?” Shake asked, leaning toward the round-backed driver.

“Very bad,” said Suvaji, turning slightly toward his passengers. “Farid Hamil is big Communist!”

Biff and Shake exchanged glances.

“Is that so?” said Biff, waiting for the driver to continue.

“Yes—big spy,” Suvaji repeated.

“Well—what do you think of that?” Biff said. He could see that Shake was a little surprised at the cab driver’s candidness.

“This what you want to know?” Suvaji inquired with a grin.

“Yeah—exactly,” said Shake. “You sure have your finger on the pulse of the underworld, pal. Thanks loads.” Shake looked over at Biff and winked.

Taz Norkay had not opened his mouth, and since he had not been with Biff and Shake when they quizzed the driver the night before, this talk was all Greek to him. Moreover, he was engaged in deep thought about the task lying ahead of them. Suddenly, he said:

“I am betting they took Maulagiri Pass.”

The Sherpa boy did not notice Shake’s quick gesture

of caution.

“At Musarri, caravans stop for water and supplies. Caravans from three passes—Chumbi-Hi, Tanorka, and Maulagiri—stop there,” Taz rambled on. “If our fathers were seen—”

Taz stopped as Shake’s hand squeezed his knee in a warning signal.

They rode the rest of the way to the airport in silence.

“Happy landings,” said Suvaji, as his three passengers piled from the cab.

“Yeah, sure,” said Shake Lakum, paying him. “Keep that purty engine clean.”

The smile melted from Suvaji’s face. Lie slipped the car in gear and roared away from the taxi stop.

“I wish we hadn’t let slip about those passes,” the pilot said, staring after the cab.

“I’m sorry—I didn’t know,” Taz said.

“Suvaji seemed pretty cooperative to me,” Biff said. “Lie did tell us about Hamil being a Commie spy.”

“Sure—after we already knew it,” Shake said, still following the fleeing cab with his eyes. “That could have been done on orders—to gain our confidence—get us to talk freely while we’re in his cab.”

“I don’t know what good it would do them,” Biff said.

Shake thought a minute, then grinned. “I don’t know either,” he allowed, “especially if we get to your dads before they get to Tibet. Let’s go!”

CHAPTER VI

Off to Maulagiri Pass

THE moment they took off in the *Williwaw*, their good fortune seemed incredible. To the south, the sky was angry and stormy looking but to the north, in the direction of Musarri and Tibet, the sky was a beautiful blue. The airport tower assured them the storm behind them was stationary and would not move in their direction.

The *Williwaw*'s engine hummed at a beautiful, melodious pitch which satisfied even Shake. The supercharger, in which Shake had installed the new part, seemed to work perfectly.

Taz located Musarri on the map for Shake; he set his course toward the village; and a lovely tail wind rocketed them straight toward their destination.

Less than an hour later, they saw a mushroom-shaped cloud of dust.

"Musarri," said Taz. The dust indicated the presence of many caravans in the village, he told them. That

increased their chances of finding someone who might have seen their fathers.

The terrain, which became more mountainous as they penetrated the foothills of the Himalayas, offered no obstacle to their landing. Musarri was in a river valley, and the dirt road leading into the village made a perfect landing strip.

“Everything A-Okay so far,” Shake said, as the *Williwaw* glided to a stop at the edge of the village. Within a minute of their landing, a cavalry charge of village children, attracted by the landing plane, stampeded down the road toward them. Amidst the uproar of greetings in Nepalese, Hindustani, Pakistani, and pidgin English, Taz discovered that the boy atop the camel, thirteen, beturbaned, and cocky, was the son of the Musarri horse trader and spoke some English.

“Our fathers would need animals for the trail,” said Taz. “They would get them from Parpi Bai, the horse trader. He is my father’s friend. He might have information for us.”

The young camel rider offered his steed to Biff and Taz for the trip to town. Shake said he would stay with the *Williwaw* to keep it from being torn to pieces by the ever increasing mob of Musarri youngsters.

As they galloped off on the first camel Biff had ever ridden, he told Taz he was convinced the camel was a beast covered with steel wool, stuffed with rocks, and created by a committee.

When they reached the village, the young camel driver didn't slow down the beast a bit. They galloped past small knots of men gathered beneath trees near the village square. They were leather-faced men, with the dust of the trail on their boots, their hands, their garments.

The camel lurched to a stop before a stable with the name, Parpi Bai, upon it; and at a piercing cry from the young driver, the beast collapsed beneath them like a folding tent. When he had finished the maneuver, the camel turned to look at his passengers, and a peculiar growl began to form deep in his throat.

The young camel pilot made a frantic motion with his hand and began to stammer in Hindustani.

"Okay—we're going, we're going," Biff said, glaring back at the camel.

"Duck!" Taz shouted.

Biff didn't ask questions. He ducked.

The camel spat.

Taz dodged just in time.

When Parpi Bai came out of the stable, the boys questioned him. Yes, he knew Izling Norkay. What's more, he whispered, he had a secret he had kept from the whole village. He led the boys to a huge haystack, pulled aside some hay, and revealed a dusty jeep!

"Your father and his friend came in the middle of the night. I sold them two horses," said Parpi Bai. "No one saw them come or go."

"Which way?" Taz asked.

“Maulagiri Pass,” whispered Parpi Bai. “I think—”
“Psssst!” came a warning from behind them.

The son of Parpi Bai stood in the door of the haymow, his eyes big at sight of the jeep.

Parpi Bai hastily covered his secret and growled, “What is it?”

“The two commissars—from the last Tibetan caravan—on their way in, Father.”

“Commissars—sounds Communist,” said Biff.

“All caravans from Tibet now have Communist guards with them,” whispered Parpi Bai. “To my son, they are all commissars.”

The horse dealer made a quick inspection of his camouflage job, then motioned the boys to follow him to the front of the stable.

Halfway there, they met the “commissars.” They were short, stocky, wooden-faced Chinese with pockmarked cheeks. Each wore a fatigue hat with the red star emblazoned on the crown.

Parpi Bai bowed and rattled a greeting to them in sing-song Chinese.

One of the Reds began to speak rapidly, and all the while, he kept his eyes on Biff. Biff saw Parpi Bai look at him, then Taz, then at the other Red. The conversation was obviously about Biff Brewster, U.S.A.

Out of all the talk, Biff heard one word he recognized: “Melican.”

He saw Parpi Bai shake his head, “No.” Then Taz shook his head, “No.”

So Biff shook his head, “No,” and his mind raced frantically, trying to recall any words of any language besides English.

“*Auf Wiedersehen*,” he said, smiling foolishly. “*Ja wohl. Sprechen Sie deutsch. Feliz Navidad!*”

Taz looked as if he’d had a sudden attack of scarlet fever combined with the ague.

“*Au revoir*,” he said to the two Chinese, shoved Biff toward the exit, and the two scampered to their humped taxi.

“Even this thing looks good compared to those two characters,” Biff mumbled, as they climbed aboard. The hunkered-down camel stayed hunkered.

“How do you say mush in Hindustani?” Biff asked.

Taz said something gutturally impressive. The camel stayed hunkered.

“You may know mountains, but you’re flunking camels,” Biff growled. He thought a minute.

“Let me try. Giddyap!” he yelled.

Nothing happened beneath them.

Two shadows appeared in the door of the stable.

“The commissars,” whispered Taz.

“Where in heck’s our chauffeur?” Biff growled.

At that precise moment, their young camel pilot came flying around the corner of the stable.

“*Barack ack ack!*” he yelled in the camel’s direction, then stepped up and whacked the beast squarely across his snout.

The camel’s stern lurched skyward. The bow

followed the stern. “We’re off!” Taz shouted.

“In all directions!” Biff yelled. But suddenly all parts were going in the same direction—straight down the village street, thundering past row after row of Mongolian, Indian, and Chinese faces screaming curses after them.

“Must be a one-way street!” Biff yelled.

“*Barack ack ack!*” yelled a little voice far in their dusty wake. “*Barack . . . ack . . . ack!*”

Some distance ahead they saw the wings of the *Williwaw*, the greeting committee still clustered around it.

“What ho?” shouted Shake Lakum, as they approached at a mad gallop.

“You mean How Ho!” yelled Biff. “How *do* I ‘ho’ this beast?”

“The rope—in his mouth!” screamed Taz. “Pull!”

Biff pulled. “Hoooooooooooo!” he hollered.

Their camel ho’d—suddenly and completely. Taz wound up on top of Biff, and Biff ended up atop the camel’s left ear. They clawed their way sternward to keep from falling what seemed like skyscraper distance to the ground.

The Musarri juvenile welcoming committee enjoyed it immensely.

Shake Lakum roared with laughter. “Now whaddaya do to get down off that thing?” he gasped.

“We wait till *Barack ack ack* gets here, that’s what we do,” said Biff. “I’ve pushed my luck as far as I’m

going to.”

“Well, while we’re waiting, how about telling me what happened in town?” said Shake.

“Holy smokes, we forgot the good news.” Biff laughed. “Tell him, Taz.”

“We located our fathers!” said the Sherpa boy.

“Guess where?” Biff put in.

“Maulagiri Pass,” said Shake.

“Right,” said Biff, slapping Taz on the back. “Just like the man said.”

Taz beamed.

“Now for the next step,” said Biff, rubbing his hands together.

“Which means getting back into this iron bird and flying to Maulagiri Pass. We try to spot your dads and drop ’em a message wrapped in a wrench,” Shake said.

Biff’s face fell. “But I thought Taz and I would trail them on foot.”

“Over my daid carcass,” said Shake. “No, we’re gonna do it my way.” He studied their situation atop the camel. “That is, just as soon as you find a way to bail out of there.”

“*Barack . . . ack . . . ack!*” came the cry from down the road.

The welcoming committee cheered as the young camel jockey trotted up, put his nose right up next to the camel’s and screamed, “*Barack ack ACK!*”

Nothing.

The boy added two whacks of his crop across the

beast's snout.

Whoosh went their steed into a collapsed mound beneath them.

"Yippee! It's those punctuation marks that do the trick!" Biff shouted. He handed the camel jockey a rupee. "Here, *Ack Ack*," he said, "buy yourself a horse!"

"Let's go!" said Shake impatiently.

The boys climbed aboard the *Williwaw*, Shake waved back the cheering crowd of Musarri kids, and started the engine. They taxied down the road, turned, and headed upwind in a beautiful take-off.

They were five hundred feet off the ground when their fantastic luck began to run out. For as they circled over Musarri, they looked down at a swirl of dust racing up the road toward the little village. Biff rubbed his eyes and looked again at the vehicle causing the moving dust storm. It couldn't be! But it was.

It was a taxicab—an ancient, high-topped taxicab.

It was Suvaji's taxicab, roaring toward Musarri!

CHAPTER VII

Through the Gorge

“WELL, well, well,” said Shake, watching the cab race by the children below. “Looks like our friend Suvaji has an important engagement in Musarri.”

“If only I had not mentioned Maulagiri Pass in that taxi,” Taz groaned.

“Forget it,” said Shake, watching the cab enter the village. “Which way to Maulagiri Pass?”

Taz pointed to a thin ribbon of dirt far below—a narrow twisting away toward the northeast.

Shake banked hard right, gunned the *Williwaw*, and said, “Let’s just see if we can’t snatch the mice right out of the jaws of the cat!”

Their luck continued to hold, for the *Williwaw* hummed like a blue-tail fly, visibility was perfect, and they were able to get a clear view of the trail for miles ahead.

Biff glanced around the cabin of this ship in which he had spent so many adventurous hours during his

stay at Ghost Glacier in Alaska. There were dials, tubes, and gauges studding the panel which the manufacturer of this airplane had never dreamed of. These had been “invented” and installed by Shake Lakum to tailor the *Williwaw* to the punishing demands of Alaskan bush flying.

Behind the seats were the emergency packs, stuffed with food and clothes, ready in case of the forced landings so common in Alaska. Strapped against the bulkhead, was Shake’s .30-30 rifle and ammo. Stuffed into a corner was “Maria,” Shake’s battered old trumpet which he played to cheer himself on those long, lonely flights over the Alaskan bush country.

“I always thought the bush was rugged,” said Shake. “But this—” He whistled at the sight ahead.

They were flying straight toward “The Hump,” so dubbed by World War II pilots of the old DC-3’s, who had pronounced the Himalayas the roughest, most treacherous, storm-plagued stretch of terrain on the face of the earth. And the *Williwaw* passengers soon found out why. For the deeper into the mountains they flew, the rougher the air became. The bumps didn’t bother them particularly—at first. The trail below was clearly visible, and only when it wound through groves of bamboo or beneath stands of poplar or hardwood, was it necessary to dip into really bothersome air in order to scour the road for signs of travelers.

Taz’s use of the binoculars saved Shake from having

to investigate every little movement on the trail. The Sherpa boy had a remarkable ability to identify shapes and forms at great distances. But as the time dragged on, they realized they were flying closer and closer to the forbidden Tibetan border. And as yet, they had not seen a sign of two men and two horses.

"They must have really galloped last night," murmured Shake. "We should have caught sight of 'em by now, surely." He paused and drew a deep breath. "*If* they're on this trail," he added.

Biff felt a tightness in the chest, and he too drew a deep breath.

Taz smiled at the two Western men and pointed at the altimeter.

It read 15,000 feet! That, Biff realized, was 5,000 feet *above* where service pilots turned on their oxygen!

Shake nodded, then reached out and flipped a switch marked "blower."

"I can give the engine more air," he said. "Wish I could do the same for us."

"Look!" Taz cried suddenly. He was holding the binoculars in one hand and pointing off toward eleven o'clock.

Biff and Shake stared ahead. They were approaching a wedge-shaped cleft cut through the mountain by a river which they could see sparkling at the bottom.

"Halfway up the canyon!" Taz insisted.

Now Biff saw it. The trail wound through the canyon about five hundred feet above the river. And

on this narrow, clinging rock path, there was movement!

Shake eased back on the throttles to lose altitude and get closer to the movement on the trail. When he did, the *Williwaw* began to hit the big bumps again.

Taz was doing his best to keep the binoculars trained on the movement in the canyon, but it was getting more and more difficult to do so. He had just shouted, "Yes. It's two men and two horses," when the *Williwaw* hit a down draft which plummeted them a full thousand feet before they hit bottom with a jolt that jarred teeth and snapped necks. When Taz looked again, he had lost sight of the figures on the trail.

"They're there—I know they're there!" he gasped. "I lost them in the shadows."

Shake wrestled the *Williwaw* lower still. The canyon was in almost complete shadow because the sun had not risen high enough to light its deep recesses.

"There! I saw them again!" Taz yelled. "Two men, definitely!"

Biff had to strain without binoculars, but suddenly he saw the figures too. There were unquestionably two of them, each leading a pack animal. But again, they faded behind a turn in the tortuous trail.

"I'm gonna try to fly *through* that canyon," announced Shake, "but hang on! It's gonna be *beau-coup* rough!"

The *Williwaw* dived toward the canyon, bucking and pitching. It was as though they had plunged into

an invisible snowbank! Their airspeed dropped, and a wave of frigid cold enveloped them.

"There's a terrific blast of wind pouring through that gap!" Shake yelled.

"It starts about nine thirty this time of year," Taz told them. "It sweeps down from the Chang Tang plateau in the interior."

Shake glanced at his panel clock. "Right on time this morning," he yelled. There was a happy grin on his face now—the grin Biff had seen many times in Alaska when Shake had to forget instruments and fly by the seat of his pants.

Taz had his binoculars glued to the trail below.

"There!" he shouted, pointing to a spot about halfway through the canyon. The *Williwaw* roared through the gap, and as they passed the spot, Biff strained to identify the slowly moving bodies below.

"No use. I can't get more'n a glimpse of them," he complained. "Can we go lower?"

Shake banked the *Williwaw* in a wide turn as they roared from the north end of the canyon and out over a narrow valley.

"One more coat of paint on that right wing and we'd have had it," drawled the bush pilot. He craned his neck to examine the spectacular vista beneath them.

The valley west of the river presented the most picturesque sight. It appeared arrow-shaped at this height, with the point of the arrow being a small

glacier, tucked right between two high mountains farther west. From the bottom of the glacier trickled a small stream which coursed aimlessly through the valley and finally emptied into the river below. On each side of the stream was a wide, gravel bed, the gravel carried from beneath the glacier for centuries by the gushing waters.

Shake completed his circle turn and aimed at the mouth of the gorge again. This time, Biff could see, he was aiming lower.

“Got your insurance paid up?” the bush pilot joked, fighting the bucking controls.

Biff hung on and began to search the canyon walls ahead once more.

But the men had vanished.

And as the *Williwaw* zoomed out of the gorge, Shake pointed straight south toward another complication. Storm clouds.

The black front of the great monsoon, which the Katmandu weather station had assured them would remain stationary, was decidedly unstationary. It was, they could see, already dumping part of its great load of moisture on lands a few miles south.

“That baby is moving this way fast,” Shake said.

“I’ll bet we’ll see them this next time through,” Biff said hopefully.

Shake looked at Biff and winked. “Okay, okay— I’m goin’,” he chuckled.

And once more, Shake bulled the *Williwaw* through

the great, wind-swept gorge.

They saw no one.

Wheeling out over the narrow, double valley, the bush pilot was shaking his head slowly.

"I think we've had it," he said. "Those guys down there might have decided to hole up out of that wind. They might have fallen in the drink. They might have—anything." Shake looked at the boys seriously. "And, of course, they could always be not the guys we're looking for."

Biff looked back at the gorge.

"Could we wait and see?" he asked weakly.

"As far as fuel goes, we could," Shake said, checking his gas gauge. "But don't forget that storm's movin' this way."

Biff peered through the canyon at the advancing black monsoon. Then he started examining the ground below.

Shake followed his gaze.

"Put down, you mean?" said the pilot.

Biff nodded hopefully.

"Take a look at the terrain down there," said Shake. "The east valley is impossible with that scrub pine. The only spot in the west valley is that gravel bar. That stuff can look smooth but be as full of mushy spots as a Hollywood movie. And what one of those things can do to a landing gear—"

The engine coughed.

"Carburetor ice?" Shake queried, looking quickly at

his gauges.

“Nope,” supplied Biff. “Your temp gauge says thirty-four.”

Now the engine belched, the plane slowed, and began to lose altitude.

“Well, looks like we’ll have to test that gravel bar for mushy spots after all,” Shake drawled, squirming firmly into his seat and gripping the wheel for the delicate work ahead.

The bush pilot banked the *Williwaw* into a heading straight up the arrow-shaped valley, dropping its nose quickly so as to touch down at the very end of the gravel bar to the left of the glacial stream. With the engine coughing and spitting, Shake co-ordinated his stick and throttle to near stalling speed just before touch-down.

“Like the man at flight school says,” Shake murmured, almost to himself, “this is where you either do or you don’t.”

This time he did.

The *Williwaw*’s wheels touched the gravel bar, and the occupants braced for any sudden lurch that might forewarn of a ground loop. But the gravel stayed firm, and after a run of only a few score feet, the *Williwaw* rolled to a stop.

“Lakum he talcum and shakum but he no breakum,” Biff sighed—repeating the expression originated by the Alaskan Indians who had been responsible for Shake’s nickname.



*The "Williwaw" touched down at the very end
of the gravel bar*

“As advertised,” said Shake, with a grin.

They piled out of the *Williwaw* on to the gravel bar. Stretching their legs, they looked around at the valley in which they had landed. Straight ahead loomed the great arrowhead glacier, water gushing from its base in a sparkling stream that tumbled by their right wing. On each side hulked the great mountain ridges. High on the north slope, Biff could see grass and flowers, and he could hear birds singing.

High on the south slope lay a monastery.

“Say, look at that!” said Biff excitedly, reaching into the plane for the binoculars. He stared at the gloomy stone structure through the glasses, then handed them to Taz. “What do you make of it?” he asked.

“Looks deserted,” said Taz, slowly sweeping the great walls and empty, staring windows, noting part of one wall had caved in.

“Any sign of life?” Biff asked.

“No,” said Taz.

“None here either,” Shake said suddenly.

They turned around to see Shake pointing beneath the open cowling of the *Williwaw*.

“At least not very much,” he added, leaning in toward the engine.

As the boys crowded up next to him, he tested parts for looseness, grunted cryptically like an examining physician, then reached for his tool box and began exploratory surgery.

Biff and Taz stood by like nurses, handing him the

wrenches and tools he requested, taking parts from him as he severed them from the engine.

Then, faintly across the valley, there drifted a soft, aimless sound—the sound of a bell.

Biff looked up toward the decaying monastery and reached for the binoculars. He trained the glasses on the stone tower rising from the center of the sanctuary. The sight of a great bell leaped into focus, its clapper decorated with a large white feather.

Biff handed the glasses to Taz.

“A falcon feather—to catch the wind and keep the bell ringing in tribute to Buddha—even when no one is here,” explained the Sherpa boy reverently.

“But—but there is someone here,” whispered Biff, pointing toward a boulder on the side of the mountain.

Taz and Shake wheeled to look. There by the boulder stood a man of Mongolian cast in a shabby wool robe. His head was shaved, and around his neck hung a string of large beads. At his waist was a red sash, on his feet, worn felt boots turned up at the toes.

But if his garb was strange, his action was stranger.

He was sticking out his tongue at them!

CHAPTER VIII

Welcome to Po

“IS HE balmy?” Shake whispered, staring at the odd figure.

“No,” Taz said. “That’s a Tibetan greeting. He’s a monk.”

The monk smiled cautiously and bowed.

The three *Williwaw* passengers smiled and bowed back.

The monk grinned and bowed vigorously.

“Look, somebody break this up,” Shake growled. “Say something, Taz.”

Taz said something in Tibetan, Biff guessed.

The monk’s joy was unrestrained. He laughed, showing every tooth in his mouth. He chattered a stream of words, and as he chattered, he shuffled down the mountainside toward them. Biff couldn’t understand what the man was saying, but he thought he heard the monk repeating the word “Po” quite a few times.

“What’s this ‘Po’ he keeps repeating?” Biff whispered to Taz.

“‘Po’ is Tibetan for Tibet.” Taz laughed. “He is saying, ‘Welcome to Tibet.’ ”

“Oh, great!” moaned Shake. “I was afraid of that.” He looked around as though he expected Communist officials to start popping out of the rocks any minute.

The monk neared them, still bowing and smiling. As he drew close, Biff could see that the man was extremely thin and his coarse wool robe was worn.

“He must be from the monastery up yonder,” said Biff.

Taz said something to the monk and pointed to the ruined monastery high on the slope.

Instantly, the monk’s demeanor changed. The smile left his face, and he looked sorrowfully up at the ruins on the mountain. Then he began to speak to Taz in a low, sad voice.

“He sounds like he’s got trouble,” said Shake softly.

“He has,” said Taz. “He says that once this monastery had many monks. They were very happy here. Then the Red soldiers from the north came. They wrecked the monastery, stole the food, and took away the abbot and some of the older monks. One by one, the other monks left. Now he is the only one left in the valley.”

“Why does he stay?” Shake asked. “It must be lonesome here.”

Taz spoke to the monk, and the man answered. As

he did, the smile began to return to his lips.

When he had finished, Taz explained, "He says he is keeping watch over the monastery until the monks return one day. And he is not lonesome. He has some animals and, he says, he goes to the end of the valley to watch people pass on the trail through the canyon each day. He said he saw us flying through the canyon, and when he saw us land, he thought we were Communists, and came running to see what we would do. But, he says, when he heard us, he knew we were not Communists."

"Oh? How'd he know?" Shake asked.

"We were laughing," said Taz.

Shake looked at the monk and grinned. The monk grinned back. Shake laughed, and the monk laughed.

"Heck, let's not start this again!" said the bush pilot suddenly. "Look, ask him if there's anything we can do for him."

Taz asked, and the monk shook his head, and began to gesture toward them each in turn, and to motion toward his mouth.

"He says it is for *him* to do something for us," Taz interpreted. "Lie wants us to have tea with him!"

"Okay by me," said Shake. "If he doesn't mind me dining with greasy fingers!"

Taz passed on Shake's remark, and the monk laughed uproariously. Then he began extracting objects from his robe.

First came a package of black tea which he laid on a

rock. Then a small pouch, an earthen vessel containing something greasy looking, a steel and flint, some tinder, and finally a teapot.

The monk hurried to the stream, filled the teapot, set it on a rock, and began gazing around the mountainside. He appeared to have spied something he needed, scrambled up the slope, picked up a crusty, brown substance, brought it back, crumbled it up, added tinder to it, and struck his flint against the steel. With amazing suddenness, the fire was blazing.

The monk added the tea to the water, poured a little salt from the pouch, then sat back on his haunches to wait for the water to boil. He chattered like a magpie to Taz.

“Learning anything, Taz?” Biff called out with a chuckle.

“Yes—plenty,” answered the Sherpa boy. “He says we’re just over the border from Nepal, but the first Communist inspection station is twenty miles on down the river.”

“Hey!” Biff exclaimed. “That means we have twenty more miles to catch up with our dads.”

“*If* we had something to catch up with them in,” murmured Shake, digging at the engine’s entrails.

“How’s she look?” Biff asked anxiously.

Shake straightened up slowly from his greasy surgery. In his hand was a bent piece of metal.

“Well, there it is,” said the bush pilot.

“What is it?” Biff asked.

“That,” announced Shake, “is the super-charger part that you saw me pick up at the airport the day you arrived at Katmandu. And that super-charger part has done quit—because it is *not* the part I ordered. I had the feeling it wasn’t when I put it in, but I thought those guys in the States oughtta know. So now my super-charger clutch is gone, and I have lost half my horsepower, and ain’t that a revoltin’ mess!”

Biff’s heart sank. “Will she—fly?” he asked.

Shake looked up at the towering mountains hemming them in. “Oh, she’ll get up—but gettin’ up high enough to fly over those hills with a full load is another thing.”

“So?”

“So, we’re gonna have to have everything going for us that we can get,” he said, looking up at the clear blue sky. “When that sun gets about twelve o’clock high, the air will be a little warmer. Then if we jettison some of the useless junk that’s collected in this ship, we just might get up high enough to go back through the canyon yonder.”

“Shake . . . ? It was Taz calling to the pilot in a scared voice.

“Yeah, what’s up?” asked the pilot.

“Shake, I hate to tell you this,” said the Sherpa boy. “But you can’t wait until the sun gets high.”

Shake scowled. “Why not?” he asked.

“Because the monk tells me that about eleven o’clock every day that glacier begins to melt faster, and

the water floods out from the bottom of the ice, and fills the valley!"

"Oh, *great!*" howled Shake Lakum.

The startled monk jumped a foot.

"Look at it!" Shake snapped, pointing toward the base of the glacier. "It's already started."

The boys looked disconsolately at the water that had, indeed, increased in volume in the short time they had been stranded in the valley.

"What's to be done?" asked Biff.

Shake studied the steadily slackening stretch of gravel between the ship and the glacier. He examined the mountains again, then slapped the side of the *Williwaw*.

"Unload 'er," he commanded.

"Everything?" Biff asked.

"Everything!" Shake snapped. "Hurry!"

So they fell to, and in eight minutes, had completely emptied the *Williwaw's* cabin of its contents—emergency packs, rifles, parkas, and a collection of miscellaneous gear. When the stuff lay in a pile on the gravel bar, Shake reached down, picked up a flashlight, a map, a pair of sunglasses, and the tool box.

"These, I'll need," he said. "The rest is yours."

"Ours?" Biff echoed, smiling. "What does that mean?"

"It means," said Shake, "that you two lads are walkin' back!"

“*What!*” shouted the two boys simultaneously.

The startled monk spilled the tea he was pouring.

“Yep! Walkin’,” said Shake. “Because in this high, thin air, I couldn’t get this thing off the ground with all of us in it. Two of us, I might, but that would leave one of you behind, and I know you wouldn’t go for that—so I fly, you walk. Meet you in Katmandu—so solly!”

A smile had begun to steal over Biff’s face, and his eyes wandered toward the river gorge at the end of the valley, then back to Taz Norkay.

“Fellows—may I say something?” Taz began.

“I see that Brewster look!” Shake interrupted, slamming shut the engine cowl. “You think you’ll just mosey over and check on those two guys on the trail and *then* hike to Katmandu, don’tcha?”

Biff grinned. “What’s the harm?” he asked. “We’ve got twenty miles to play around in. And if the men we saw are our fathers—”

“Fellows . . .” Taz began again.

“And what if they *aren’t* your fathers?” Shake snapped. “What if they’re a couple of Commie hatchet men?”

“Please, if you would allow me—” said Taz, more insistently this time.

Shake and Biff both stopped and looked at Taz.

“Sorry,” said Biff. “What is it, Taz?”

“The monk saw our fathers on the trail,” said Taz calmly.

Biff jumped forward and grabbed the Sherpa boy by the arm.

“How do you know? How can he be sure?” he demanded.

“The way he told it, it had to be them,” Taz replied. “He says the men he saw looked like us, only taller. One was white like you until he stopped on the trail and stained his face brown!”

Biff turned slowly and triumphantly toward Shake. “Well! What do you say now, brother Lakum?”

Shake grinned. “Well, you’d have done it without my blessing anyway, I know,” he said. “But now go *with* my blessing. And as they say in Alaska—rots of ruck!”

CHAPTER IX

Everything Is Go

THE wounded *Williwaw* took off from the 12,000-foot-high valley with motors straining. The prop found little nourishment in the thin air, as the laboring plane lumbered down the gravel bar and lurched heavily into the air.

Biff and Taz watched Shake baby it into a wide corkscrew spiral that brought the *Williwaw* slowly to a level with the canyon leading south.

Then, with a last feeble wag of the wings, Shake slipped into the tail wind pouring through the gap and disappeared into the canyon.

As they turned back toward the pile of material jettisoned from the *Williwaw*, they noticed the monk standing there, looking forlornly toward the spot where the plane had vanished. In his extended hand was a steaming cup of tea.

“How do you like that!” Biff said. “Shake forgot his tea.” He stepped toward the monk, and with a bow,

reached for the cup in the Tibetan's hand.

The monk's smile came back in a flash. He bowed and proffered the tea.

As Biff drew the cup close to his mouth, he noticed a swirl of some fatty substance floating on top of the brew, started to investigate, but decided that might be rude, placed the cup to his lips, and took a deep draft.

"Ugh!"

Without thinking—almost as a reflex action—the exclamation of distaste sprang from Biff's lips. The tea was the foulest concoction he had ever tasted.

Taz was howling with laughter. He said something to the monk, and the monk began to simper, and then he too howled with mirth.

"What in the world *is* that?" Biff demanded.

"Butter tea. Never saw a European or American yet who could stand the stuff," said Taz, breaking down in merriment again.

"Butter tea?" Biff stared at his cup. "What kind of butter is in it?"

"Rancid butter," said Taz.

Biff looked down at his tea, grinned, and said, "Oh, well, that's different." He then proceeded to drink every drop in the cup.

When he had finished, he bowed low, handed the cup back to the monk. He took one step back and stuck out his tongue at Taz.

Taz roared with laughter.

"Okay, laughing boy," said Biff, "now let's get to

sorting through this stuff, pick out what we want, and get started.”

They set the two emergency packs of food, the sleeping bags, a compass, flashlight, and two parkas into two neat piles. They lashed them together into packs which they would be able to tote on their backs.

As they sorted, Taz chatted with the monk and Biff could tell by the change of expression on the monk’s face that Taz must be speaking to him on a serious subject.

“What’s the conversation about?” Biff asked finally.

“I’m telling him why we’re in Tibet,” said Taz simply.

Biff had a panicky feeling for a moment, a fear that loose talk could lead to trouble. But he knew from the character in the monk’s face that this man could only be sympathetic to their cause.

“Look,” said Biff, “we have lots of stuff we can’t possibly take with us—stuff he can probably use. Why don’t we give it to him?”

There were two neckties, a jackknife, a pair of tennis shoes, a few chocolates in their box, a magnifying glass, a big box of kitchen matches, a fingernail clipper, a pair of snowshoes, a straw hat, a pair of wool socks, and a razor with two packs of blades.

The monk bowed low to both boys. A grateful glow was in his eyes. Lie looked at the packs they were preparing to lift to their backs, then he motioned to the boys to follow him.

The monk took off up the mountain past the boulder where they had first seen him. He followed a winding path that headed in the general direction of the gorge. About halfway up the mountain, he came to a crude, stone shelter.

He motioned for the boys to wait for him. Then he ducked inside the stone hut, and a few moments later, he backed out of the shelter, leading behind him two shaggy ponies.

They were smaller than horses, but rugged looking. On each of their backs was a crude saddle. They looked almost exactly alike, but what was most



outstanding about them was their ears. Each of the ponies had one bright yellow ear. It was the left ear of one, the right ear of the other.

The monk led the ponies to the boys. He put one rope bridle in Biff's hand, one in Taz's hand, bowed, stepped back, and waved his arm in the direction of the gorge.

"He—he wants to give them to us," said the startled Taz.

"But—but this is too much," Biff protested. "I'll bet they're his only ponies—his only company."



The monk said something to Taz.

“He says we must take them—our loads are too heavy for us to carry. He says when we are finished with the ponies, they will come back to the valley.”

“Come back—does he mean by themselves?”

Taz asked the monk the question.

The monk grinned slyly, then pulled back the burlap flap of the stone hut and clucked at something within.

Out from the dim interior strolled the ugliest dog Biff had ever seen. He was huge. He was wooly. He was pigeon-toed. His nose was bulbous, almost like a blossom on his face. His coat was snarled, snagged, and even missing in spots. There were scars all over his body, and his tail was crooked in the middle.

But what was most arresting about him was his eyes.

He was cross-eyed!

“Is—is that a dog?” Biff asked.

“Dascha,” said the monk, smiling slightly, and then reeled off some more Tibetan, with gestures toward the cross-eyed dog.

“He says,” explained Taz, “that Dascha was rescued after a terrible dog fight in one of the caravans that passed on the trail down the valley. The monks nursed him back to health. He lived with the ponies while he was recuperating and became attached to them. As the monks became discouraged, and one by one left the valley, they would borrow the ponies. But always

Dascha would bring them back. Now they have not left the valley for a long time, but he knows that no matter how far we go with the ponies, Dascha will know how to bring them back to the valley.”

“Well, I hope he doesn’t have to bring them more’n a couple of miles,” said Biff, looking hopefully toward the gorge and the trail which wound out of it along the mountainside in an easterly direction for about ten miles. “What do you say we mush?”

They slung their packs aboard the ponies, and with a deep bow to the monk, bade him good-by and set off in the direction of the trail at the gorge.

No sooner had they reached the river, crossed it, and scaled the cliff to reach the trail, than Biff had his first premonition of impending trouble.

“It just occurred to me,” he said, “the monk said he saw our dads on the trail—” Biff stopped.

“Yes?”

“He could only have seen them from this side of the gorge. The men we saw were on the other side of the gorge. So he couldn’t have seen the same two we did.”

They walked along, silently considering that fact. Both were beginning to feel the oxygen poverty of the air at this high altitude. Every step began to be a chore. The trail was narrow, rugged, and presented a sheer drop to their left which made them fairly cling to the rock wall.

They were learning that letting their two trail-wise ponies lead the way was the safest procedure. They

walked for about a half hour, nagged by the persistent thought that there might be two pairs of travelers on the trail. Taz led the way around a hairpin turn in the trail, then suddenly backed up fast.

“Hey, what in the—?” Biff began.

Taz raised his finger to his lips. He crooked his finger at Biff and motioned him to his side.

Together, the two boys peeked around the hairpin turn toward a flat place on the trail ahead. The flat place was at the mouth of another small gorge through which the river passed, coming from the north.

Sitting on that small, flat place, smoking and calmly talking, were two men.

One of them was Farid Hamil!

CHAPTER X

A Quail SOS

IT WAS easy to figure the answer, lying there on their stomachs watching Farid Hamil.

Somewhere along the way, Hamil had picked up this companion in the Red army uniform who was sitting beside him. And while Tom Brewster had gone on happily in the belief that he had shaken Hamil off his trail, Hamil hadn't been shaken at all. The agent obviously had been following the engineer and the Sherpa guide ever since they had left Katmandu. He probably had watched the two men hide their jeep and pick up their ponies in Musarri. That was probably where he had picked up the Chinese soldier and his own ponies. So Biff knew now that it was Hamil, his companion, and their two horses whom they had seen in the gorge and mistaken for their fathers. By the time the *Williwaw* arrived at the gorge, their fathers already had passed through it and were on up the trail. Ironically then, if they had ignored the two figures

they had seen from the *Williwaw* and had kept going just a little farther up the trail, they would have seen the two men the monk saw—one of whom had colored his face brown—the man who almost had to be Tom Brewster.

But fate had tricked them in the gorge and grounded them in the *Williwaw*. The combination had resulted in Hamil and his Red friend having just enough time to interpose themselves between the fathers and the sons—making it impossible for Biff and Taz to get by and warn Tom Brewster and Izling Norkay that they were being followed.

As Biff lay thinking, a lovely, mournful bird song rose to his ears from the valley far below. It reminded him of something his father had said in the hotel at Katmandu just the day before—a homesick remark about wanting to hear the whistle of a good old bobwhite quail.

Biff whistled the plaintive call tentatively to himself, softly, experimentally—an idea forming in his mind.

He looked at their surroundings—the narrow trail, the high walls, the narrow gorge—absolutely no way to get around Hamil to warn their fathers that they had not shaken pursuit, but were being shadowed all the way.

“Hamil seems in no hurry. Our fathers must have stopped to eat,” whispered Taz.

“Or to sleep maybe,” Biff murmured. “They didn’t have a wink last night.”

He went back to his experimental whistling again, the plan slowly ripening in his mind. And then it was ready.

Biff pursed his lips, looked down at the two men waiting below to observe the effects of what he was about to do, and then blew sharply the one short, one long whistle of the bobwhite quail.

Taz jumped. Biff calmed him with a wave of the hand and a wink.

Again, Biff whistled the quail call—louder this time, watching the men carefully to see if they had detected anything strange, anything artificial in the whistle.

But Hamil and his friend seemed totally unaware that the whistles were not a part of the chirps and calls of the rest of the birds in the valley.

Now Biff decided to use full volume. He slid back into a depression in the rock wall to provide himself with a megaphonic, reflecting background. He took a deep breath, pursed his lips, and blew.

Three longs—two shorts—three longs. The international distress call—SOS—but as a quail would call!

Would his father, numb from hours without sleep, catch the significance of the whistles? Would he remember his innocent remark about quail to his son the day before?

And the men below—would they suddenly awake to the realization that never a quail in all the world whistled like this?

But the men smoked on. Biff's heart beat fast, the minutes ticked by, his hopes rose, then slowly fell. Then when he had nearly given up hope—

Almost lost in the whisper of the dying wind, a plaintive, answering call—the call of a bobwhite quail. Three long—two short—three long.

Biff lifted his fist triumphantly to Taz. He looked down at the men below, who had now raised their heads and were looking down the valley.

“Let's not push our luck,” whispered Biff. “We've done what we came for. They're warned. Let's shove off.”

They turned the ponies and headed back down the trail toward the south. They had traveled less than a half hour from the spot where they had overtaken Farid Hamil and his Chinese companion, when Taz again, stopped suddenly.

The Sherpa boy drew back against the rock cliff, yanked Biff after him, and pointed.

Far ahead, three men were hiking toward them. Even at this distance, it was easy to see who they were.

Suvaji and the two commissars from Mussari!

The boys collapsed against the rock wall as though each had just been hit in the solar plexus.

“Holy cow! Caught in a squeeze between Hamil and Suvaji!” Biff groaned.

“We've got to turn around again,” Taz whispered.

As they crept up to the spot which they thought fearfully was the end of the line, the spot where Hamil

had been camped, he was gone!

“Well, I’ll be—” said Biff, stepping out to the flat spot overlooking Hamil’s camping ground. “I wonder how Hamil got wise? How he knew our dads had moved?” he murmured.

“I don’t know,” said Taz, “but let’s hope they keep moving up ahead so we can keep moving back here.”

They followed the ponies down the narrow trail, making certain they stayed out of sight of the three men behind them. In the clear air of these mountains, it was easy to see things for long distances, and the boys didn’t want to have Suvaji catch even a glimpse of them.

Then time took care of the danger of their being seen. Night fell.

“This will give us an advantage, I think,” said Taz. “I doubt that Suvaji is an experienced mountain man. He probably won’t dare to keep moving in the dark.”

Almost as he said it, they saw a strong electric torch blink on far behind them. In its beam, they could see the outline of three men, still walking—still following.

“Any more brilliant theories?” Biff asked.

“Mush!” growled Taz.

CHAPTER XI

Out of the Squeeze

THEIR hike that night was an agony of suspense. Yet they couldn't stop, they knew that. They were riding a tiger and couldn't get off. Their breath came in gasps, and even the ponies and Dascha were breathing heavily. But every time they were tempted to stop to rest, they could see that light winking along behind them. And each time they looked, it seemed to be drawing closer.

Ahead there was no light, but that didn't surprise Biff and Taz. Their fathers certainly wouldn't display a light for Hamil to follow, and Hamil certainly would not show one to give away his presence to Tom Brewster and Izling Norkay.

They lost track of time. They knew only that one minute the moon seemed to the right, then suddenly, it was far to the left, and then it wasn't there at all, and there was a funny grayness in the east.

And suddenly, it was dawn—yellow and beautiful,

adorning the peaks with diamonds, painting the mountain with long shadows. It was incredibly, unbelievably, a new day, and it had seemed only minutes since the last one.

They could see the trail stretching out ahead and behind, clinging to the mountainside, cutting through the gaps, winding away toward the horizon, and not a living soul upon it.

"Where *is* everybody?" Biff said giddily.

"Are you all right?" Taz asked, peering at Biff.

"Oakey-dokey," said Biff. He pointed at the two ponies. "But if it hadn't been for those two fellows, we'd have been in real trouble. They are the ones who are really oakey-dokey." He beamed, still looking dazed. "That's a couple of good names for those two—Oakey and Dokey." He pointed at each pony and then at the wooly, cross-eyed dog. "Oakey, Dokey, and Dascha," he laughed, naming each animal in turn.

"You look pale," said Taz.

"I *feel* pale," said Biff weakly. "I need chow." He looked back down the trail behind them. "Suvaji or no Suvaji, let's eat!"

So they ate from the emergency stores taken from the *Williwaw*. It was concentrated food topped off with a shared candy bar, and swigs of glacier water from the canteen they had filled back at the monastery valley. They gave a candy bar each to the ponies, fed them some of their crackers, then filled Taz's hat with water from a dripping rock so the animals could drink.

To Dascha, they fed a can of corned beef hash and a piece of cheese.

When they were through, Taz said, "You still look too white. I mean, we are in Tibet. It might be embarrassing if we should meet a yellow Chinese or a brown Tibetan who would wonder what a white American was doing here."

"I see what you mean," said Biff.

They dug into Shake Lakum's effects and came up with a bottle of iodine. Biff painted his face with the antiseptic—then his hands. When he had finished, he turned around suddenly. "Guess who?" he said.

"I'm trying to guess *what*," Taz smiled. "You'd make a good American Indian."

Biff shook the sleeping Dascha, who jumped up in confusion and growled at him.

"Well, I fooled him anyway," said Biff. "Maybe these Communists and Tibetans aren't as critical as you."

They removed all traces of their meal so that if Suvaji passed here, he would see no evidence of their presence. Then they pressed on.

The trail had begun to widen and become less steep, and just as they were beginning to enjoy the better road, they topped a rise and there before them lay the bane of all travelers—the fork in the road.

"Oh boy, this is all we need—a direction problem," Biff drawled.

They hurried to the junction, and as they drew close, Biff could see a pile of stones which seemed to

have been laid by human hand. He could see bits of cloth, paper, and metal studding the pile and thought for a moment it might be a sign of some sort, indicating where each of the two roads led.

“A cairn,” said Taz Norkay.

“What’s a cairn?” Biff puffed.

“An offering to the spirit of the pass, laid there by travelers along this route. Each traveler adds something to it—a stone, some personal fragment . . .” Taz was walking around the rock cairn, apparently studying it as he spoke.

“Unfortunately, it doesn’t tell us which road our dads took,” said Biff, staring up one road, then the other. “We really are in trouble now.”

“Maybe not,” said Taz softly, still studying the rock pile, fingering a bit of cloth here, a fragment of paper there. “There has not been too much added to the pile lately, and I thought that perhaps—*ah!*”

The Sherpa boy reached down triumphantly and plucked a strand of blue wool from beneath one of the rocks.

“From my father’s sweater!” he said, holding the yarn aloft. “I knew he would never cross a pass without adding to a cairn.”

“But does it tell you which fork they took?” Biff asked.

Taz looked up one road, then the other—a puzzled frown on his face. But before he could answer, Biff plucked the strand of wool from his fingers. He had

noticed some knots in the yarn.

“By golly, they did tell us which fork they took,” he said exultantly.

Taz was looking at him questioningly.

“The knots!” Biff cried. “They spell out R—R for right. They took the right fork! They knew we were behind them, and when Dad heard me send him an SOS in Morse code, he did the same thing with this yarn—the small knots for dots, big knots for dashes. They went to the right!”

The boys yanked at Oakey and Dokey and hurried up the right fork which immediately began to steepen and become narrow again.

“I wonder if our dads found a way to shake Hamil and his man?” said Biff.

“That fork was a good place to do it,” said Taz.

The slope was so steep, they were scrambling and slipping up the trail now. Even their ponies were having trouble climbing, and the heavy breathing was so loud from all the straining lungs, Biff felt sure they could be heard all the way to the border station. He knew they must be very close by now.

The view was magnificent. The mountain they were on was higher than any they had traversed, and looking back, they could see Maulagiri Pass twisting south for miles and miles. Ridge after ridge stretched away to the south—looking like giant corduroy with little green valleys between the rises. Far off to the east rose a wind-scoured peak towering above all its

neighbors, snow lacing its sides, soft clouds forming a halo about its bulk.

“Karanse,” said Taz.

Biff wiped his brow and looked up at the trail which still lay before them. It was at that moment his eye caught a glint of something shining on the sheer mountain side, far off the trail and near the rocky spine of the great peak.

“Taz!” he croaked. “Look!”

There, in plain view, crawling slowly toward the mountain top, were two figures. One large and muscular, one small and lithe. One with a nylon parka—one with a wool sweater.

One was Tom Brewster, the other was Izling Norkay!

Biff started to open his mouth to shout to them, but before he could, Taz had grabbed his arm and was pointing back down the trail where the fork was clearly exposed to their view.

Standing at the fork were two men. One was the Chinese—the other was Farid Hamil.

But that wasn’t all.

Taz was pointing even farther down the trail over which they had traveled. He grabbed for the binoculars, looked for a moment, then handed them to Biff.

Trudging up the trail, less than ten minutes from where Farid Hamil stood, came the two commissars from Musarri and the taxicab driver, Suvaji!

CHAPTER XII

Cat-and-Mouse

“WELL,” said Biff, “as Shake would say, ‘haven’t things come to a revoltin’ head all of sudden?’ ”

The boys shrank back against the rocks, stared up at their fathers still struggling toward the top of the mountain, then back toward Hamil and his man at the fork, and far down the trail, toward Suvaji and the commissars.

“Hamil will be heading this way now,” said Taz, “and they can’t miss seeing the two of them climbing up there!” He held his glasses on the two climbers for a moment, then swung them around to the figures far down the trail.

“Suvaji will soon catch up,” he added. “Then Hamil will know we are here.”

“I know—I know,” said Biff frantically. He could not keep his eyes off Tom Brewster and Izling Norkay and their snail-like ascent of the steep stone face.

“I wonder why they left the trail and went that

way?" he asked.

"To avoid the border station probably," said Taz. "I'm sure it is not far ahead."

Biff looked up to where the trail executed a series of hairpin turns, then disappeared over the summit.

"You think the border station is over that crest?" he asked.

"It must be," said Taz.

Biff snapped his fingers. "I've got an idea," he said. "Like Shake told us, they *want* our dads inside Tibet because they have information about the phantom caravan that the Reds don't have. That's why Hamil has been giving them all this rope—so they could be followed until they locate the phantom caravan—then boom—the Reds pounce!"

"You are probably right," said Taz.

"So they planned to make it easy for Dad and your father to get into the country, I'm sure. If we hadn't warned them, they would probably have tried to bluff their way right by the border station up yonder. But they know now that they'll be tailed from there on. So they are crossing the Commies up by swinging around the border station and entering at a spot where they *won't* be seen and trailed."

"Yes, but—"

Biff jumped. Hamil and the Chinese soldier were starting to leave the fork and head up the trail behind them.

"If we stay here, we're sunk," said Biff, "and so are

they." He pointed toward their fathers. "So, we're gonna play decoy."

"I don't understand," said Taz.

"The Reds at the border station have probably been told to let our dads through without too much fuss," said the blond boy. "But they've never seen them. Now, we look like our fathers, so I think they would let us by."

"What good would that do?" asked Taz.

"For one thing, it would distract Hamil's attention from them, if we walked where he could see us. At this distance, he could easily mistake us for them. We could keep him distracted until we got by the border station, then try to shake him, and get back into Nepal through another pass."

"It might work." Taz smiled. "It might work."

Biff was pointing down the trail behind Hamil and his man. Suvaji and the commissars were closer to the fork. "It might work now, but not after those guys make contact with Hamil," said Biff. "So let's go." He took a deep breath. "How's my make-up?" he asked.

"A beautiful shade of—of some color." Taz smiled.

"Okay, decoy—let's mush," said Biff, and they marched ahead to the unobstructed part of the trail.

They could feel eyes boring into a spot between their shoulder blades as they trudged up the path. They wanted to turn and look back, but they knew this might give away their ruse. If Hamil had binoculars and saw their faces, he would know what was going

on. Their backs, however, might fool the Communist agent.

They wanted to look up the mountainside to see what progress their fathers were making, but they had to resist this temptation also.

Step by step, they traversed the open stretch of trail, certain that they could be seen clearly by Hamil and the Chinese below. When they arrived at the first hairpin turn, they were out of sight temporarily and heaved sighs of relief. There had been no bullets zinging their way, no sign that their trick had been discovered. And now, they could look up toward the climbing figures.

Izling Norkay and Tom Brewster had disappeared.

Biff and Taz shook hands happily. Part one of the plan apparently had worked. Now for part two—getting by the border guards.

They toiled upward, around one hairpin turn after another, never looking back, and, finally, with lungs heaving, took the last steps toward the crest. They stood on the brow of the great mountain, looking on toward the hazy interior of Tibet in the far distance.

And in the near distance—just a hundred yards down the trail, in fact—the Communist border station!

It was not very imposing. A couple of stone buildings, one flying the hammer-and-sickle flag—a corral with a couple of horses, two stone pillars suggesting a kind of gate, a small guardhouse, and two

stumpy Chinese soldiers whose rifles were leaning against the guardhouse. They were squatting in the dust facing each other, playing what appeared to be a game of dominoes.

“It isn’t what I’d pick for a vacation site,” Biff remarked, “but at least it’s downhill.” He rubbed his sore legs and shook his feet.

At that moment, one of the guards looked up and saw them. He said something to the other guard, and they rose quickly to their feet. The one who had first seen them gestured impatiently for them to come forward.

“Well, here goes nothing,” Biff murmured, and led the way down the slope toward the two guards.

They could see the guards’ eyes examining them closely as they neared the stone buildings. When they had almost reached the two men, Biff heard one of them mumble something to the other in Chinese. He decided that they had been identified as the two travelers for whom the soldiers had been waiting.

The next few minutes left no doubt in Biff’s mind.

The two soldiers pretended to be interested in their packs, the .30-30 rifle, the binoculars, and the emergency rations, but the boys saw that their examination was superficial and hurried.

As the guards made their inspection, Biff let his eyes wander idly toward the stone buildings, up toward the rock walls, searching for evidence of observers watching them.

He saw nothing.

Glancing back at the soldiers, he saw one of them studying his face, and for a panicky moment, Biff thought there was something wrong with his make-up. But the soldier's eyes dropped as Biff looked at him, and the blond boy decided the soldier was simply curious about these two travelers for whom this cat-and-mouse game had been concocted by their superiors.

The inspection was soon over; and, with a slap at the haunch of Taz's pony, the guards waved them on.

Biff let out his breath in a slow sigh of relief.

They headed slowly down the trail, trying to act as nonchalant as possible, but Biff thought he could feel eyes peering at them from every direction. Finally he could resist the temptation no longer. He had to look back. But at the gate, everything was calm. The two guards had returned to their game of dominoes. There was no sign of Hamil or Suvaji.

There was a turn in the trail ahead. Once beyond it, they would be out of sight of the guards. All they had to do then, was shake off any possible pursuit. That was all, thought Biff wryly.

But as they turned the curve, there was a surprise awaiting them.

Lining the right side of the road, for about a hundred yards, were scores of men and animals queued up in single file as if awaiting some order. There were mules, asses, horses, and yaks—loaded

with great bundles. There were men in pigtails and black fur coats.

“Caravans,” whispered Taz, as they began to pass the silent legions. “That’s why we didn’t meet anybody. They’ve been holding them here until we came through.”

Biff tried to look nonchalantly at the great, shaggy yaks with their burdens of wool. He even nodded at a couple of the Mongol-eyed men, but got no nod in return. The only reaction came from a couple of caravan dogs who wandered out stiff-legged to sniff at Dascha, but backed off when the crossed-eyed dog growled at them.

Biff was so engrossed in observing the exotic sights that he missed the first “psssst” from Taz. When he did hear him, he saw Taz nod toward the rear.

Biff looked back.

A man on a shaggy pony had drifted out from the column. He wore a fur hat and a black fur coat, fastened at the waist, which he had peeled back off his torso, letting the arms drape over the horse’s haunches. They could see a knife scabbard at his belt, and he had one leg curled up in front of him as if he lived in the saddle. He was slowly following them.

“Well, it begins, I guess,” said Biff.

“Yes.” Taz sighed. “It begins.”

CHAPTER XIII

Lose the Shadow

IT HAD begun—the test of Taz’s mountaineering ability versus the shadow’s stalking skill.

Their plan, decided the boys, would be to head east, parallel with the border for about twenty miles, then cut south and leave Tibet via Tanorka Pass, which Taz said he knew well.

And somewhere in that twenty miles—shake the shadow.

It was a fine plan—except that Tibet wasn’t built that way and the shadow wouldn’t shake.

The trail they were on followed the mountain ridges part of the time, then dipped into the valleys part of the time. But all of the time, it bore gradually northeast—heading somewhere toward the interior, away from Tanorka Pass.

Every attempt to leave the trail led them up paths which petered out against the mountainside or drew them into minute valleys with unscalable walls.

Always the shadow was waiting—just behind the last ridge, lolling in the saddle, fading from view when they appeared.

Then the rains came—suddenly, violently out of the south, catching them on a high ridge and pelting them with stinging rain and fierce wind. When they were soaked completely through, the hail came, big as golf balls, frightening the ponies with its violence. The dark-brown clouds boiled around them, and the thunder reverberated in great, booming rolls. Their only consolations were that their stalker was suffering the same misery, and that in this storm, they might finally succeed in losing him.

It was then that they benefited from a lucky accident. In the violence of the storm, they had wandered off the main trail and onto a path which finally led to a plateau—one of the numerous small plateaus found in the Himalayas, which are simply the tops of mountains with the peaks sliced off.

On the plateau stood a black tent.

It was, explained Taz, a nomad herder's tent, probably abandoned, since there were no dogs posted outside and no smoke curling from the peak.

The tent *was* abandoned and fairly dry. They were exhausted, wet, and miserable, and had ceased caring whether their shadow was lost or was right outside the tent. Flopping on the ground, they decided to stay the night.

There was a small bit of yak dung left on the stone

hearth. With matches from Shake's emergency stores—the only dry thing left in their pack since the matches were in a watertight container—the Sherpa boy started a small, sputtering fire.

They heated rain water in their one pan and made tea. Biff jumped when he saw Taz lift the boiling tea to his lips, then remembered this was possible at high altitudes where water boils at a low temperature. They had a can of beans each, then stripped off their clothes and made ready to climb into their warm sleeping bags, only to discover these too were damp. They crawled in, anyway, and in the light of the dying fire, drifted off into exhausted sleep.

Shivering with cold, Biff was the first to awaken. The wind was howling outside the tent, the yakskin walls were flopping, and the flap had blown open. Dascha stood in the entrance, a sodden lump, his teeth chattering. Just behind the dog, Biff could see the two ponies, their shaggy hair blowing in the fierce wind.

Now Taz was sitting up beside him, his teeth chattering. Looking at the animals, then at Biff, he asked, "Shall we?"

"Why not?" said Biff.

So in came the animals. Oakey on one side, Dokey on the other, the two boys in the middle, and Dascha lying across their freezing feet. They slept, two boys and three animals, sharing their warmth and misery.

But it was, as it turned out, one of their lesser

Tibetan privations. When they opened their eyes in the morning, they found a beautiful, white surprise outside.

“Snow! In the middle of summer! What a country!” moaned Biff.

There was no way of starting a fire since there was no dry fuel. All the yak dung, Tibet’s universal fuel, lay under the blanket of snow outside.

So they climbed back into their sodden clothes, rolled up their soggy bedrolls, and put them on their damp ponies. They each ate a can of corned beef hash, washed it down with the last of the glacier water, and realized they would soon be using the last of their food.

The snow was slushy, the wind still raw. But the sky was bluing, the sun beaming, and the view magnificent. Far to the east it lay—an etching in stone and water. Dominating the scene was one great peak, higher than all the rest. At its base lay a huge lake, flat, calm, and mirroring the magnificence of the mountain in an almost perfect reflection.

“Beautiful,” murmured Taz, the mountain lover.

“Boo!” growled Biff, the food lover. “Not a supermarket in sight.”

Then, to make matters worse, there were tracks in the snow—tracks of a horse, at the edge of the plateau.

Their shadow?

They didn’t know, but they didn’t wait to see. They took off in a winding, tortuous route which they felt

sure no one could follow. Only it led back eventually to the main route again, which continued to drift northeast away from the border and Tanorka Pass. And one hour later, far behind, was the lone horseman again.

The sun came out and dried them. But when Biff wanted to stop in an idyllic-looking valley, Taz said, "No . . . leeches."

"Whatches?"

"Leeches," repeated Taz. "Tibetan valleys are full of them in the summer. Big, luscious, delicious strawberries—and great, black blood-sucking leeches."

They encountered the Tibetan national character too. Every traveler they met, every caravan would ask where they came from, where they were going, what they were selling.

"One of these people is going to see through that make-up pretty soon," Taz said.

So they began searching harder than ever for side trails. They found one and wandered far from the main route through the mountains across a desolate plateau.

They slept on the hard ground, and they heard ghosts . . .

"I hear a darned caravan, I tell you," mumbled Biff in the middle of the night. "I hear men talking and horses . . ." He paused, straining his ears against the night wind. "And a yak, I smell him!"

"Go to sleep. It's a herd of wild asses," Taz told him.

And as he beamed the flashlight into the dark, they saw a curious herd of lovely, yellow-and-gray asses, Kiang, as Taz called them, galloping away in the dark.

Biff felt, he said, like the bottom of a bird cage. He just had to have a bath. So it seemed a heaven-sent answer to his hopes when they came across a hot spring—one of hundreds in Tibet.

With a cry of joy, Biff leaped happily in.

Then he leaped frantically out—with a cry of horror!

“Look!” he screamed. “That thing!”

“It’s just a snake,” Taz said, laughing. “He’s harmless. They just like the warm springs better than cold rocks.”

The brief bath paid off in still more grief. The warm waters removed a good portion of Biff’s iodine make-up; and they had no sooner started hiking again when they met a caravan. They were accosted by the two Chinese guards accompanying the convoy of yaks and mules on the way to Nepal.

“Oh, he is a Kazak,” Taz lied, pointing to Biff. “You know all Kazaks have blue eyes and blond hair.”

The guards examined Biff critically, then glanced back at Taz and let them pass. Kazaks, Taz explained later, were a tribe who had come to Tibet from Russia during World War II.

Later, Taz drew Biff off the trail and told him he would have to dirty up.

“Do what?”



They were accosted by the two Chinese guards

“Rub dirt on you. So you’ll look like everybody else on the trail,” said Taz.

By now, they knew, Hamil and Suvaji must have made contact and must know that they were *not* Tom Brewster and Izling Norkay.

So why didn’t the shadow close in? But he didn’t. He stayed always just over the last rise—always just far enough behind so he was merely a silhouette on the horizon, a flurry of muffled hoofs in the distance, a shadow in the gloom.

Finally, the shadow did make his move.

Biff awoke at dawn in their camp in a sloping valley. A mist was drifting across the small lake nearby, when the blond boy heard again the muffled, clinking sound he had heard before—the sound of a moving caravan. He shook Taz and commanded him to listen. This time, Taz listened, and heard—and saw.

He and Biff saw the silhouette of the mounted shadow drifting toward them through the mist.

They picked up their gear, jumped on their ponies, and fled. They galloped out of the valley through a narrow pass and turned sharp left at a spur in the trail.

They came to a dead end at a cliff—and a dead end in more ways than one. For they discovered that in their panic and haste, they had lost the rest of their rations. All they had left were their canteens full of water.

Then Taz noticed some ladders dangling straight down from the cliffs. “Bee gatherers’ ladders,”

explained the Sherpa boy. The bees lived under the bluffs on which they were standing. The bee gatherers used the ladders to get down to them in order to smoke them out and rob the hives.

Biff looked over the edge and saw a few bees humming idly about. Beneath the bees was honey, dripping from the brimming hives—honey for the taking. But oh, what hazardous taking!

Hunger drained the strength from their fears. Surely, the bee gatherers, whoever they were, would not mind two starving boys helping themselves to a little honey.

So down the ladders they went, step by step, only arm's length from the gray hives dripping with the sweet nectar and swarming with venom-armed proprietors.

The boys dangled at the end of the swinging ladders, sock-wrapped sticks in hand, ready to light them and smoke out the bees. It was then—of all times—that the shadow, or somebody, made his move.

They heard Dascha growl a warning on the cliff above. They heard a horse advancing stealthily. By now, they had come to know the sound of his horse's hoofs.

They looked at each other, looked at the socks on the ends of the sticks, looked at their matches, and got the same idea at the same time.

They lit the socks, jabbed them into the cracks in the bluff, and ducked into their parkas.

Out boiled the angry bees—out of the brimming hives and up over the cliff. Over, around, and on to everything atop the cliff they swarmed.

Such howling, whinnying, stomping, slapping, and yelling hadn't been heard by Biff since his last class picnic.

But fifteen minutes later, when the smoke had died and the bees had stopped swarming and returned to their hives, the boys climbed up the ladders to discover that their inspired weapon had been a two-edged sword.

For while they had certainly chased the shadow, or whoever it was, far, far away, they had just as certainly chased away Oakey, Dokey, Dascha, their sleeping bags, and their rifle.

"And our last chance of getting out of Tibet alive, I guess," Biff grunted.

For two days, they ate juniper berries and drank water dripping from rocks. They didn't know where they were going—south wasn't too important now. Only food was important—and water. They walked in whatever direction it seemed most likely they would find such things.

Thus it was, at dusk, that they crept up on the Khamba bandits squatting about their campfire, guzzling their wine, and hurling their "*Ah Dach Ah-hhhhhhhh*" at the moon.

Biff pointed out that the Khambas had food. Taz Norkay and Biff Brewster did not. That was bad.

However, the Khambas had wine—Taz Norkay and Biff Brewster did not, and that was good. Because sooner or later the Khambas were going to pass out if they kept pouring it down as they were doing. And when they passed out, that would leave two leather bags of yak cheese unchaperoned.

“So,” Biff suggested, “let’s wait and chaperon that chow—before we starve.”

Such was their plight when Biff began his review of the events that had occurred in just one week, leading them to this spot behind a Tibetan boulder—thirsty, tired, scared—and hungry!

When the last Bedouin fell forward on his face, the two boys crawled out on their stomachs from behind the boulder, measured the distance to the campfire, and prepared to go over the top!

At that precise second, two bodies flashed through the air behind them. Hard knees landed on their spines. Strong hands pulled their heads straight back.

Ambushed!

CHAPTER XIV

Hello Again

BIFF'S spine was bent into an agonizing U. His neck was arched back until he could barely draw air through it. From the groans beside him, he knew Taz was going through the same torture.

Then, all the fatigue, hunger, the days of tension and anxiety took their toll. Biff saw dancing spots in front of his eyes, heard sirens roar in his head, and with a great rush of crashing sound in his ears, passed into unconsciousness.

There were disconnected moments of lucidity. He thought he felt himself being dragged across the ground by his bound feet. Then, he could feel himself being lifted across the back of some hairy animal and carried face down for what seemed like a painful eternity.

He came to with a rush. The first thing he saw through the haze was Taz on the ground beside him. Then he saw a campfire, two black tents, and four

pairs of legs.

The legs led to four faces—the faces of the two commissars from Mussari, and standing beside them, Suvaji and Farid Hamil!

The gags were yanked from the boys' mouths.

"So," said Farid Hamil, "the sons."

"Surprised?" mumbled Biff weakly.

"Oh, not at all," said Hamil calmly, motioning to the two commissars to prop up the boys back to back. "We have known for days that you were the sons and not the fathers."

"I'll bet," said Biff. "Then why didn't you grab us?"

Farid Hamil chuckled, and without answering, he reached for a teakettle sputtering on the fire. He poured two cups of tea and handed one to each of the boys. Biff sniffed his suspiciously.

"Go ahead," said Hamil. "I assure you they are not drugged. And since you have had nothing for two days, it should taste good."

Biff sipped the tea. It was not butter tea, for which he was grateful. Hamil then signaled to Suvaji to serve them food from containers spread about the fire. In a few seconds, they found themselves looking at an unidentifiable kind of hash, hard-boiled eggs, and gummy-looking rice.

They were famished and began to wolf the food. Biff could feel strength flowing back into his numb body.

Covertly he examined the terrain in which the camp was located. It was dark, and he could make out only

dim outlines, but they appeared to be in a small valley with but one narrow opening. High rock walls on all sides made entrance and exit to the valley impractical except through this narrow opening. Biff made mental notes of the location of the tents, the spots where the horses were tethered, the distance from there to the valley exit.

"I would definitely not recommend that notion you are toying with," Hamil said.

Biff tried to hide his start of surprise.

"Besides—where would you run to?" Hamil smiled. "To the Khambas?"

Biff tried to give the man a blank stare, but he could feel the pulse in his temple throbbing.

Farid Hamil leaned over toward Taz Norkay. "I'm sure you have told young Brewster about the charming reputation of the Khambas?"

Since they were tied back to back, Biff could not see Taz's face, but he felt the Sherpa boy turn his head away.

"So you see,"—Farid Hamil was almost purring—"you are much better off with us. If the Khambas had suspected your presence there—well!"

Biff had heard of Communist brainwashing—of the sweet reasonableness they used in weakening a prisoner's resolve, and he knew he was seeing an expert performance.

"In other words," Hamil continued, "we intend to be fair and honest—so honest, in fact, that I will freely

admit that, for a short while, your little trick had us fooled. Your fathers also tricked us into a wild-goose chase up the wrong fork in the road,” Hamil continued. “They sent their ponies up the left fork, while they *hiked* up the right fork. If the ponies had not stopped to graze, we might not have detected the ruse until too late. As it was, when we returned to the fork and saw you two, we still were not sure that those two ponies we found were not merely strays—for since we knew nothing of your presence on the trail, it was inconceivable that the two travelers above us could have been anybody *but* your fathers.”

Biff could not restrain a smile of satisfaction.

Hamil smiled back. “The dog we thought might be a stray since the caravans are full of them.

“Oh, yes, it was an inspired idea,” he conceded. “And it almost worked.”

Before he thought, Biff had lashed back at Hamil. “Almost, *nothing*,” he spat. “While you were looking at us, our fathers were climbing over the mountain right around your little border station!”

He could have cut his tongue out the moment he said it. Had that been a flicker of interest in Hamil’s eyes? Biff couldn’t be sure. He didn’t see what good the information could do Hamil, but he was determined to control his tongue in the future.

“Yes, we know your fathers were able to slip by the border station because of your trick,” Hamil admitted. “I became aware of that when Suvaji caught up with

me. Suvaji wanted to seize you immediately, but I was convinced you must have concocted this scheme with your fathers, planning to slip by me and make contact with them later. We decided to trail you and see what happened.” Hamil laughed. “Young Tazling’s skill in the mountains, plus your absolutely insane actions, almost succeeded in losing us.”

Biff tried hard not to grin, but knew he was.

Hamil smiled back. “Oh, yes,” he went on. “In fact, we lost you completely between the border station and the caravan with the two guards—the two guards whom Tazling told you were a Kazak!”

A little alarm rang in Biff’s brain. What nonsense was Hamil giving them? The mounted shadow had been glued on their trail between the border station and that caravan!

“And we lost you a couple of times more on the way to the bee cliffs,” continued Hamil. “But when we saw those two yellow-eared ponies and that dog fleeing the cliffs with the bees and the bee gatherer galloping behind them . . .” Hamil laughed again.

Biff’s alarm system rang again. This meant Hamil had arrived at the bee cliff *after* they had smoked the bees out. And that reference to the bee gatherer? Of course, it *could* have been the owner of the hives—the gatherer. But the mounted visitor had arrived so cautiously, they had been convinced it was their stalker—their shadow. Biff was getting really confused now.

“But from the bee cliffs on,” Hamil said, “we never lost you for a moment. Which was not difficult, since you were on foot and slowing down every minute.” Hamil reached out and gripped Biff’s shoulder. “We admired your pluck, really. Even when you were so foolish as to lie in wait to steal the Khambas’ food. But we decided it was time to step in to save you from yourselves. Had they caught you, you would no longer have been available as a source of information to us.”

“If you mean information about our fathers, you’re out of your mind,” said Biff. “We haven’t any idea where they are,” he paused. “Or what they are doing.”

“Oh, now, now,” Hamil chided. “We have reason to believe that the phantom caravan is in this vicinity. Do you expect me to believe that it is a coincidence you ended up here also?”

Biff fought to keep his stare blank. But again, Hamil seemed to read his thoughts. “To further demonstrate how reasonable I am, I will now allow you a few hours rest. I know how weary you are. It will give you an opportunity to refresh your memories about any details concerning your fathers—such as any plans to meet them, which may have slipped your minds, or any information concerning the phantom caravan which they may have passed on to you.”

Hamil signaled to the two commissars. They jerked the boys roughly to their feet.

“Gently—gently,” chided Hamil. “We must not break my word to these young gentlemen. We must

remain reasonable.” His face froze for a moment. “Until they become *unreasonable*. Then we would be perfectly within our rights to employ other methods of extracting information.”

Hamil looked at the two commissars on each side of the boys.

“The Chinese have such quaint, un-American methods of extracting information,” he said. “I believe Tazling could fill you in on these.”

He nodded to the two commissars, and they led the two boys to the nearest tent. Raising the flap, they shoved the boys inside.

The dim glow of the firelight barely penetrated through the crack left by the tent flap. The tent was absolutely empty and firmly moored by stakes and rocks, leaving no space to crawl under any side, and less chance for escape through its walls since it was made of yak hide, which is as tough as elephant skin.

“Well—what do you think old Sweet-and-Reasonable has up his sleeve?” Biff whispered, peering through the crack in the tent entrance.

“To give us time to scare ourselves to death, I suppose,” answered Taz.

“Or to give himself time for something,” said Biff, alert at the peephole.

“What do you mean?” Taz asked, falling to his knees beside Biff.

Biff pointed to Hamil and Suvaji, standing beside one of the pack animals. In his hand, Hamil held a

shiny, black object from which he was pulling a long, whip antenna.

“A walkie-talkie,” Biff whispered.

“For what?” asked Taz.

“For calling *somebody*,” Biff said, watching Hamil begin to speak into the instrument.

“His confederates?” Taz suggested. “The Occupation Government?”

Biff snapped his fingers.

“Of course! He’s reporting to somebody back near the border station, letting them know our fathers went over the mountain, so they can start trying to pick up their trail from there.”

“I’m afraid you’re right,” Taz said.

“Boy! Am I a great help with Operation Caravan!” Biff moaned.

CHAPTER XV

That Man Again

THEY watched Hamil try repeatedly to make contact on the walkie-talkie, but it was evident after a time that he was having no luck.

A few minutes later, they saw him retract the antenna of the portable transmitter-receiver and say something to Suvaji. The two men entered the other tent and returned a few minutes later, wearing traveling clothes.

Suvaji had a haversack with him. He slung it behind the saddle of one of the ponies and climbed aboard. Hamil carried only the walkie-talkie.

Giving orders in Chinese to the two commissars, Hamil pointed to the tent as he spoke. The two Chinese soldiers nodded, then untied the two horses for Suvaji and Hamil.

Suvaji leaned down and shook hands with each of the soldiers as though he might not return. Hamil merely nodded, and together the two men rode out of

the camp.

One of the commissars squatted down near the fire with his rifle across his knees and fixed his eyes on their tent. The other retired to the tent just vacated by Suvaji and Hamil.

“What do you think?” said Taz, stretching out in the tent.

“I think I was right,” said Biff. “Hamil can’t get a signal out from this low valley so he’s on his way to some high ridge to call his Commie pals. If he can’t reach them, Suvaji is going to take off with the walkie-talkie and keep calling until he does reach them.”

“You are probably right,” said Taz, “but that doesn’t help us much.”

“No, it doesn’t.” Biff sighed. Then, as he slid down to one elbow, he suddenly cried, “Ouch!”

“What’s wrong?”

Biff felt around the dirt floor of the tent. “I landed on a rock as sharp as a raz—”

They looked at each other as Biff stopped short. He was smiling as he slowly held up a chunk of sharp rock.

“Sharp as a *razor*,” he whispered, looking at the tent wall.

Taz looked at the yak-skin wall, then back at the rock which he could barely see in the firelight coming through the crack in the tent flap.

“But if we could cut our way out, how could we get away? It’s twenty yards to the valley entrance and no

cover in between.”

Biff slumped down, racking his brain for a scheme. If they were ever going to escape, now was their best chance—while Hamil and Suvaji were gone.

“Maybe if we started a fake argument and got the guard in here—then jump him,” said Taz.

“With that gun?” Biff asked. “Besides, it’s pretty obvious—he wouldn’t fall for it.”

“But I’m sure Hamil thought I would frighten you with tales of Chinese torture—that would be a logical reason for us to argue.”

Biff stared hard at Taz, then his mind began to assemble the assorted ideas, and suddenly they all fell into place.

“I’ve got it,” he whispered. “We argue—loud enough to cover the sound of our cutting the tent wall at first, then when we get it cut, I do another imitation—I imitate *you!*”

“I don’t understand.”

“I play *both* parts!” said Biff. “I shout in your voice, then my voice—back and forth. Meanwhile, you sneak out and when the guard sticks his head in here to shut us up, you clobber him from behind. When you do, I’ll grab his gun, and we’ll be ready for that commissar in the other tent—okay?”

Taz chuckled in the dark. “Well, it sounds like fun anyway—even if we *do* get killed,” he said.

“Okay, let’s go,” said Biff.

Taz found a seam in the tent wall, and slowly he

began to saw at the first thread with the sharp stone. As he worked, they began to argue, not too loudly at first, for they didn't want the guard investigating prematurely. But as the threads slowly parted and they began to feel air coming through the tear, they started raising their voices. Now the hole was getting larger. Soon it would be large enough to admit Taz's body.

They heard a growl outside, as if the guard were barking at them for silence.

Biff motioned frantically at Taz to cut faster. Taz sliced through half a dozen threads in the seam at one time, then half a dozen more, and now the tear was big enough.

"Okay, go," whispered Biff. "I'll really pour it on. And when I holler, 'What do you mean, you bum?' you'll know he's stuck his head in the tent. That's when you come up behind him and let him have it, savvy?"

"Savvy," echoed Taz, handing the rock to Biff and stepping silently through the hole in the tent.

Biff began to shout, playing first Taz, then himself. He shouted and berated and repeated himself and feared he would run out of words.

He heard a sudden stirring at the tent flap, and his stomach tightened. He gripped the rock firmly in his fist and kept shouting.

The tent flap opened, the guard's head was poked cautiously inside, and he shouted something in Chinese, trying to see through the gloom.

“What do you mean, you bum?” Biff yelled, grabbing for the rifle. Suddenly, Taz was there behind the soldier. He had a rock in his hand, and he brought it down on the man’s head.

But the blow did not knock the commissar out. He pitched forward from the force of the blow, but he was still full of fight.

Biff was trying to pull the soldier’s chin straight back, while Taz was trying to yank his rifle loose. Just then a figure appeared in the tent door. It was the other commissar. In his hand was a pistol, and he was barking an order which was unmistakable. He was demanding surrender—or else.

What happened next happened so fast Biff could hardly believe it.

One minute the other commissar was there, pistol in hand; the next minute a rock was caroming off his temple, and he was crashing to the ground with blood streaming from a wound in the side of his head.

It caught the commissar in the tent by surprise and he loosened his grip on the rifle for a second. When he did, Taz grabbed it.

There was a rush of footsteps outside, and a figure appeared at the tent flap. He motioned for the tent occupants to come outside.

Taz pushed the commissar ahead of them, then he and Biff followed, wondering who on earth their rescuer could be.

He was a squatty, muscular man in a fur hat and

black fur coat. He had a Mongolian face. He looked sharply at both boys, then jerked the commissar's arm toward the man lying on the ground. He pointed to the ground, and the commissar sank slowly to his knees.

Without a word, the man in the fur hat and coat tied the two commissars back to back. When he finished, he motioned the two boys to come with him.

"I like his way of doing business," said Biff. "Even if we don't know who he is."

A few minutes later, they found out.

He led them out the entrance of the valley, up a slight slope and behind a boulder. There in the gloom, stood three horses—and lying between them . . .

"Dascha!" gasped Biff, pointing to the wooly shape in the dark.

Dascha panted happily and licked Biff's hand.

"Oakey and Dokey!" exclaimed Taz, moving toward two of the ponies standing close together.

Their benefactor in the strange garb had mounted his horse, and as his figure was silhouetted against the night sky, the boys finally recognized him.

It was their shadow.

CHAPTER XVI

Now You See It . . .

THE mounted figure gestured impatiently for the boys to follow him, and turned his horse's head up the trail leading from the valley toward higher terrain.

"I don't know how or why or what!" Biff whispered, "but let's stick with this guy until he makes a mistake!"

Biff and Taz mounted Oakey and Dokey, and with Dascha panting along behind, headed into the darkness behind the silent figure.

For the next half hour, they rode in silence. And as they rode, Biff tried to put the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle into place.

The reason the shadow hadn't come forward to identify himself was Hamil and Suvaji, of course. The shadow had been afraid to make contact until the boys succeeded in shaking the Communist agents. They had finally been able to lose Hamil and Suvaji just before they got to the bee cliffs, but when their

shadow came forward to contact them, they drove him off with the bees!

There it was—the whole picture.

Biff looked ahead at the man's back.

Well, almost the whole picture.

Who was he? More important, where was he taking them?

Suddenly, the mysterious rider raised his hand to signal. Then he turned off the main path through some scrub juniper and began to scramble up a steep slope. A minute later, they came out into the clear—on a plateau that stretched ahead of them in the dim moonlight. There was something strangely familiar about it—the boulders, the surrounding mountains—!

Biff's heart jumped.

It was the Khamba campfire! This was the plateau where they had watched the Khambas drinking themselves into a stupor. There was the yak with the leather bags of cheese, the bandit ponies. Missing only were the drunken Khambas. There was no sign of them, but this *had* to be the Khamba camp. There, around the fire, was the protective ring of stones.

Biff's breath caught in his throat. They looked like stones—until one of them moved!

Biff stared hard. As they drew close to the fire, the stone straightened up. It was a strange, spectral figure. In the half light of the campfire, they could see that his clothes hung from his gaunt body like a shroud. They were tattered, filthy rags—fit only for a beggar.

His face was long, the bones prominent.

But it was his eyes that chilled the two boys. They were black—black as pitch, and they glowed as though all of this creature’s life resided in their magnetic light.

The eyes fixed themselves on the rider who had led them to this spot. Then, as the rider dismounted at the fire, those eyes were turned on Biff and Taz.

Biff felt a numbing sensation creep over him, a faintness akin to the altitude sickness he had experienced so many times on their long trek. Yet there was a subtle difference in this sensation, for it seemed to flow from those eyes and envelop him—making everything around him seem hazy.

Biff jerked his eyes free of the spectral gaze, shook his head to free it of the strange sensation, and dismounted.

Their shadow flung his fur coat off his shoulders, slid to a squatting position before the fire, and motioned the boys to do the same.

They sat down, facing him across the flames.

For a long minute, he stared at them. Then he spoke his first words.

They were short, guttural, disdainful.

“He doesn’t like us,” murmured Biff, from the corner of his mouth, “but why?”

“He says we are fools,” Taz replied.

“Tell him I agree,” Biff said, with a half smile.

The man narrowed his Mongol eyes at Biff, then aimed his words at Taz again. He spat the words out,

and without the faintest knowledge of Tibetan, Biff could tell the man was smoldering with anger.

Biff watched his face, then let his eyes drift to the “specter” seated a little behind him. Hurriedly he jerked his eyes free of that magnetic gaze as once more the strange, disembodied, light-headed sensation began to envelop him.

Taz kept his eyes on the shadow as he began to interpret for Biff.

“He says he followed us from the border station all the way to the bee cliffs. He says he knew we saw him but made no attempt to contact him. He says, instead, we led him on the most idiotic, dangerous journey he has ever traveled in his life. He says he was almost caught by Hamil and Suvaji a couple of times—especially at the bee cliff. He says he was stung by bees until he swelled up like a yak with calf! He says when he tried to rescue our ponies for us, Dascha bit him. He says he couldn’t contact us after leaving the bee cliffs because Hamil and Suvaji were right behind us. He says he set a trap for Hamil and Suvaji, and we wandered into it with our hair-brained scheme for stealing the yak cheese. He says he had to stand by while Hamil and Suvaji captured us, and then risk his neck to rescue us from them. He says he thought the free world was going to send him *men* to help him, but, instead, he thinks they have sent him idiot children!”

“Heck, that’s what I thought he thought,” Biff said.

“Tell him we are *not* Tom Brewster and Izling Norkay.”

Taz told him plainly and simply who they were *not*.

The shadow leaped to his feet. Suddenly, all around them there seemed to be sudden, violent movement. The boys couldn’t see into the gloom because of the firelight, but even the rocks seemed to come to life!

And across the fire, the “specter” was leaning toward the boys, his eyes glowing. Biff began to feel that funny, buzzing, disembodied . . .

“Quick! Tell him who we *are*!” Biff gasped.

Taz looked up at the glowering, bare-chested man looming above them.

The Sherpa boy blurted out something in Tibetan, pointing first to Biff, then to himself.

For a moment, their bandit benefactor remained poised above them, then slowly his tense body began to relax. Gradually, he began to slide down toward that squatting position again.

And gradually, Biff thought, even the rocks began to relax again. He had the strange feeling that he knew now where those “drunken” Khambas were.

The man asked Taz a brief question.

Taz began to explain. As the explanation unfolded, Biff could see its demoralizing effect on the Khamba across the fire. He knew now this rider was a Khamba, for he looked exactly like the figures they had watched for hours.

When Taz finished, the Khamba was silent for a long minute. He stared across the fire, but his eyes saw

nothing. He seemed to have suffered a great blow.

Then slowly he spoke. When he had finished, Taz turned to Biff and interpreted.

“He says, when the Dalai Lama fled Tibet, the caravan with which he left the Golden Buddha wandered through the mountains and plains of his country—always just a step or two ahead of the Communists. One by one, its force diminished as men were killed or died of privation. Finally only five members of the original caravan were left. They knew that unless help came, the Communists would soon capture them and the Golden Buddha. So they sent word to the Dalai Lama. They heard that he was sending them help, someone who would take the Golden Buddha from them, and put it in a place of safety. The caravan came out of hiding and moved near the border where the Golden Buddha could be entrusted to men from the free world. He says they thought that the two who came across the border were *those* men. So the caravan followed, always waiting for some sign from these two men—changing location at night, taking desperate chances of being caught. And now, he says, he learns that instead of the two men, he has followed two *boys*, who cannot help him. He says they are doomed.”

“Then that’s why we kept hearing something that sounded like a moving caravan at night,” Biff whispered. “It was the phantom caravan. But I wonder where it is now?”

He looked into the gloom beyond the firelight.
“Where is the phantom caravan?” Biff answered his
own question. “I think we’re in it!”

CHAPTER XVII

. . . Now You Don't

BIFF turned to Taz. "Remember Hamil saying he knew the phantom caravan was in this area?" he asked.

"He might have been bluffing," Taz said.

"But when he gets back and finds we were rescued by a Khamba, he's going to remember taking us prisoners at *this* Khamba camp. He's going to wonder why a Khamba would rescue us—and he's going to put two and two together, and it will add up to phantom caravan."

"You're right. We must warn him," said Taz.

The Sherpa boy began to speak excitedly to the bare-chested man. The Khamba's eyes showed interest. He turned and spoke to the "specter" beside him. The man's eyes glowed brighter, with an almost demented light. He began to rise, then slumped back weakly.

The Khamba explained something in low tones to Taz and his shoulders dropped.

Taz translated the remarks. “He says this strange man with him is a monk—a Lama, with whom the Dalai Lama left the Glowing Buddha when he fled. Through this Lama’s magic power, the caravan and the Buddha have been saved from capture—but now the old Lama is ill. He does not believe he can make another journey.”

Biff’s mind was racing. He felt pangs of guilt at the tragedy his actions had brought to this gallant band of Tibetan patriots. He knew he *must* make them move—to flee the pursuit he was certain would soon be coming from Hamil, Suvaji, and whatever forces they could muster through their walkie-talkie.

“Is there somewhere the caravan could hide while you and I go to look for our fathers? Ask him that, Taz.”

Taz asked, got his answer, and told Biff, “He says they do not know where to go. There is a man in Lhasa, the Tibetan capital, who pretends to be a collaborator with the occupation. He has been sending the caravan information on disposition of the occupation forces for years. It is from him that they received word help was coming from the free world. But now they do not know where it is *safe* to go because it has been weeks since they have heard from Lhasa.”

Lhasa—the Forbidden City of Tibet! Guarded from the white man’s gaze for centuries, seen by only a handful of Western people even today! Biff had read of

it and knew it was located at the eastern end of the great, desolate Chang Tang plateau, deep in the interior of Tibet, far from Western civilization. Only it was not so far away right now. In fact, after their wanderings through the mountains, they must not be more than two or three days' march from the Forbidden City.

"Look—ask him how far we are from Lhasa," Biff said suddenly.

Taz asked and got his answer.

"Four days' march," he interpreted.

Biff bit his lip thoughtfully. He got up and paced in front of the fire. Then he stopped.

"Our fathers probably are looking for this caravan where it was *supposed* to be," said Biff. "But because of us, they'll never find it. Where will they go for information? I say they'll go to the man in Lhasa—the Tibetan who's been posing as a collaborator—the man who enlisted *them*. The way to make contact with our fathers and get a chance to take the Glowing Buddha out of Tibet is to go where the Communists least expect us—Lhasa!"

The Khamba across the fire stared attentively at Biff as he heard the word Lhasa repeated. He looked at Taz as if awaiting a translation.

Slowly, Taz explained Biff's idea to the Khamba—slowly, as if the Sherpa boy doubted its wisdom, but then faster as Taz himself accepted the audacious plan, and became eager to sell the Khamba on the idea

of taking the phantom caravan to Lhasa.

And sell him, he evidently did. For as Taz finished his pitch, the Khamba jumped to his feet, new determination showing in his face. He looked toward the east and frowned.

While they had been talking, dawn was breaking. If they were going to move, they had better move soon, or else risk exposure in bright sunlight.

The Khamba reached down and helped the old man to his feet. The Lama teetered feebly, and as the Khamba murmured something in his ear, he nodded and walked slowly to a horse tethered nearby. The Khamba helped him to mount.

Biff and Taz looked pityingly at the old Lama—one of the last survivors of the caravan which had guarded the sacred Glowing Buddha so long.

“I wonder where it is?” Biff whispered to Taz.

“Where what is?” asked Taz.

“The Glowing Buddha,” answered Biff, looking around at the horses, the yak, and the ring of fortlike rocks.

Biff stared. The “rocks” rose and yawned and became the same three Khamba bandits.

The bandits glared sleepily at the two boys, then hurried to assist the Khamba leader.

“The old Lama is going on ahead. Why?” Biff whispered.

“I don’t know,” said Taz.

They followed the Lama’s progress for a minute or

two, then watched until the Khambas had finished their preparations to leave.

The Khamba leader—the man who had been their shadow—motioned the three other bandits on ahead. Mounting the horses and leading two pack mules and the yak with the trail churns, the three bandits set off in the same direction taken by the Lama.

The leader kicked the last of the sand on the campfire. As he picked up his personal effects, he glanced ahead at the departing caravan and said something to Taz.

“The caravan will go to a nearby monastery for provisions for the journey to Lhasa and for medical care for the old Lama. We will act as rear guard,” Taz said.

Biff nodded, checked the .30-30 tucked behind his saddlebag, and climbed aboard Oakey. Taz climbed on Dokey. Dascha rose to his feet expectantly.

The Khamba took one look at the cross-eyed dog and did something Biff had thought was impossible for the man. He grinned. Then he climbed into his saddle and fell into line behind the pitiful little caravan wending its way across the plateau. But they had gotten only as far as the path leading off the plateau when it appeared that their journey to Lhasa was about to come to a sudden and tragic end!

For awaiting them at the foot of the path leading down from the plateau were Hamil, Suvaji, the two commissars, and a group of five armed Chinese

Communist soldiers!

The boys reined in their ponies fast. Biff grabbed for his .30-30, but the Khamba reached out and calmly stayed his hand. He then pointed toward the old Lama, who was slowly advancing toward Hamil, Suvaji, and their Communist aides.

Some strange paralysis seemed to be overcoming every man in that small group. Hamil, who had plucked a pistol from his holster, was slowly returning it to its leather repository. Suvaji, who had started to raise a challenging rifle, was lowering its muzzle. The two commissars and the five armed Communists had become rigid as toy soldiers—each staring dumbly at the advancing Lama with the glowing eyes.

Biff's heart pounded, his mouth was dry, and when he got the words out, they sounded parched and cracked.

"Now I know what happened to me when I looked at the Lama's eyes," he whispered. "He has protected the phantom caravan all these years with . . . *hypnosis!*"

CHAPTER XVIII

Last Train to Lhasa

BIFF smothered the impulse to laugh, as the caravan paraded by Hamil, Suvaji, and the petrified Communists as casually as generals reviewing troops.

It had been this amazing hypnotic power of the old Lama that had created the legend of a caravan which came and went before one's very eyes—a caravan which melted away into mist even as one watched it.

As the plateau faded into the distance behind them, the last thing they saw, before the dust of the morning wind enveloped them, was Hamil, Suvaji, and the Communist soldiers still standing like statues as the phantom caravan began its last desperate journey to Lhasa.

The monastery of Kasapuling lay in a beautiful setting, the gloomy, stone structure clinging to a niche on the side of Mt. Gurla Mandhata. At its base was a great lake called Tangri Nor, which reflected in its flat,

calm surface the whole magnificent bulk of the stupendous mountain and the monastery perched on its side.

From the shore of the Stygian lake, a long line of moving figures wound slowly up the mountain toward the entrance of Kasapuling Monastery. There must have been a hundred monks in the column which made its way up the rocky path. Their shaved heads shone in the light of their smoking torches. Across the lake of Tangri Nor drifted the eerie chant of the songs and prayers raised toward heaven in honor of Buddha.

They had arrived, Biff discovered, just about mealtime. As they entered the dim building behind the old Lama and the Khamba leader, they could see monks passing in a line before a great, steaming cauldron. And as the fumes from the cauldron drifted to Biff's nostrils, he caught the unmistakable odor of—

“Butter tea!” he moaned to Taz. “Count me out.”

Taz laughed softly. “The monks drink fifty or sixty cups of it a day,” he whispered.

Biff gazed around at the monks who, after leaving the butter-tea cauldron with full cups, had stopped beside another huge kettle where they were served a handful of a white meal of some kind.

“*Tsampa*,” explained Taz. “Toasted barley.”

A tall man with a strange, petal-like hat on his head and a robe with a red sash came forward and helped the old Lama down the hall leading from the huge, central room of the monastery. They disappeared into

a side alcove, the Khamba following.

“The abbot of the monastery,” Taz said in awe. The other monks squatted in small groups on the floor all over the cavernous room. They had added turnips to their *Tsampa* and tea, and on each plate Biff could see a gob of butter which the monk ate with his fingers. The face of every monk in the room was smeared with the stuff, and its odor permeated the whole monastery.

Biff and Taz’s meal, when it was brought to them, was different, Biff was sure, at the Khamba’s behest. And as they ate, they could see the curious, yet friendly eyes of the monks watching them. Biff had the feeling that word of their purpose already had spread through the monastery and they were getting the de luxe treatment.

There was a braised sheep. There was thick, sour, sheep’s milk which looked disgusting, but tasted wonderful. There was rice which the Khamba handled deftly, grain by grain, with chopsticks. Biff wanted some so badly he simply scooped it up with his fingers, and nobody seemed to mind.

And there was butter tea. Biff dodged it.

As they finished the meal, they heard the crash of a great, dull gong!

The monastery abbot in the red-petal hat appeared, leading the old Lama back from the alcove where they had disappeared a half-hour earlier. New strength seemed to emanate from the old man’s glowing eyes.

His whole bearing was firmer, steadier.

The Khamba leaped to his feet, said something to Taz, and strode toward the door ahead of the two monks.

“We’re on our way,” Taz said, jumping to his feet, and they hurried to join the small caravan poised at the monastery door.

Distance in Tibet is measured much the way pilots measure distance in the air. In the air, it is by hours, on a Tibetan march, by days. The distance to Lhasa was about one hundred and sixty miles—or four days’ travel. Hard travel, Biff guessed. And he was right.

They headed northeast, traveling all night to avoid the wandering Communist patrols. Also, they knew that eventually Hamil, Suvaji, and the Chinese would both pursue and report the caravan. The alarm would be out. They were a marked group.

As dawn broke, they crossed a glacier to a trail leading up the mountain, but skirting the great ice pack.

When they reached the top of the ridge, they gazed out upon a vast, wind-swept plain which looked as desolate as the plains of the moon.

“The Chang Tang Plateau!” explained Taz. “We are nearing the middle of Tibet.”

Biff stared out at the great, arid plain which he had read of in his geography—the largest plateau in the world—an average of 15,000 feet above sea level—the drainage basin for a hundred rivers which started in

trickles of rain caught in the rocks on the surrounding mountains, gathered volume from the melting glaciers, and swept down across the Chang Tang Plateau in great torrents that flowed south and cast for thousands of miles—changing size and even names—becoming the Ganges and Yalu and the Yangtse and the Brahmaputra and the Kali and five score more rivers which fed the great fields and plains of two great lands—China and India.

Almost beneath them on the near edge of the plateau glittered the broad, surging Tsangpo river, which became the Brahmaputra once it left the borders of Tibet and entered India.

They camped on the Tsangpo's edge about eleven o'clock that morning. Tomorrow they would travel along its shore to the great bend where it turns south. They would ford it there, then head across Chang Tang to Lhasa. No use traveling at this hour—the Chang Tang winds begin at eleven, and the dust makes travel a nightmare.

So they slept, with the whistle of the wind and the whisper of the water permeating their dreams.

The second day they trekked with the river to their left, the mountains to their right. Stream after stream tumbled from the mountains to join the Tsangpo, and in one Biff saw the glitter of metallic dust. Yes, it was

The alarm would be out—they were a marked group gold, Taz told him casually. The mountains of Tibet oozed with the stuff. It washed down in every



The alarm would be out—they were a marked group

drop of water that trickled from those awesome heights. Biff studied the shiny grains, looked up at the peak from which they came, and wondered if it also contained the ore which the Communists sought—ore hidden from their eyes by the resolve of a people with faith in the Glowing Buddha.

His mind wandered idly to thoughts of the mystic statue, and he wondered where in the caravan the Buddha was hidden. He thought too of his father, who had come so far to find it and who might now be lying in need or in pain somewhere in this big, strange country.

The third day they passed a village and saw oddly shaped boats on the river, which Taz said were called coracles, made of yak hide.

"Is there anything in this country *not* made of yak hide?" Biff asked.

"Hardly anything," Taz answered. "They give their hair, their skin, their milk—and their backs. And they can do it on good grass or the wiry stuff that grows on Chang Tang Plateau. But they're about the only animal that can—which is why Tibet wouldn't be without them."

Miles from human habitation—out where there was little reason for anyone to be—they met pilgrims, devout Tibetans on their way to the score of holy places scattered through the country. Lakes, mountains, monasteries, even mountain passes were venerated for reasons understood only by these

Lamaistic worshipers.

They passed great herds of lovely wild asses, *Kiang*, with yellow backs and gray legs. Biff smiled as he realized how Oakey and Dokey had acquired their yellow ears.

Wild yak grazed, immune from hunting rifles because of the code of nonviolence observed by most people in this remote land.

That night they reached the bend where the Tsangpo curved south. Tomorrow they would ford the river and head out across the Chang Tang Plateau on the last leg of the flight of Lhasa.

The fourth day—*disaster!*

They woke at dawn, cooked, and were preparing to move when a sudden shout went up from one of the Khambas.

He stood in his saddle, shaded his eyes, and pointed west. Biff looked but could see nothing except a small cloud of dust.

But when Taz looked with the binoculars, then handed them to Biff, he saw what was causing the cloud of dust.

Galloping toward them was a platoon of Red soldiers, and at their head rode Farid Hamil and Suvaji!

CHAPTER XIX

The Forbidden City

THE Khamba leader shouted orders to the members of the caravan. Swiftly, they finished striking camp, organized the pack animals, and mounted their ponies.

The bandit chieftain grasped the halter of the yak, hurried to the head of the column, and seized the bridle of the Lama's pony in his other hand. With a sharp cry, he plunged into the muddy waters of the Tsangpo.

Fording the turgid waters was a formidable task. The ponies had to fight to keep their feet on the sometimes gravelly, sometimes muddy bottom. The farther toward the middle they pushed, the higher rose the water around the ponies' sides. Soon the water was foaming over the saddles. Biff, watching the Khambas raise their feet high to keep them dry, did the same.

Up came the water higher and higher on Oakey's

neck, then on Dokey's. Dascha was swimming frantically behind them, but because of the current, he was drifting slowly downstream.

One of the Khamba horses lost his footing. There was a yelp as the rider fell into the cold water. But he and the horse came up swimming, and in a moment, the rider had regained his seat, the pony had regained his footing, and they were moving across the river again.

The Lama, meanwhile, sat stonily astride his pony. Beside him came the yak, head high, nostrils flaring. A couple of times the Lama reached out to steady the beast by adjusting the slipping trail churns which were draped across the yak's back.

"I'd hate to eat that yak cheese after this trip," Biff shouted across to Taz.

Taz shook his head in vigorous agreement and waved his feet in the air.

Five minutes later, they staggered out on the Chang Tang side, dripping and muddy. All eyes looked back at the cloud of dust advancing swiftly toward them from the west.

The Khamba leader still held tight to the halters of the yak and to the pony carrying the old Lama. He pointed to some boulders littering the shore and shouted a command. Then he dashed behind the largest boulder and leaped to the ground. Motioning to the Lama to remain mounted, he indicated where he wanted each of the other bandits to place himself

and his animal.

Soon there was a Khamba behind each of three great boulders. They forced their ponies to their knees, pulled their rifles from the saddle holsters, and began to strap ammunition belts around their waists.

Taking the hint, Biff reached up and took the .30-30 from his saddle and ammunition from his pack.

As he began loading the rifle, the Khamba stepped forward. He reached out and beckoned for Biff to give him the rifle and ammunition. Biff slowly handed him the firearm, trying to read the meaning of the request in the Khamba's face. The Khamba looked at him, smiled, and said something, but without turning to Taz as he had always done previously.

"He says you are brave," Taz interpreted. "As a Tibetan he will never forget how you, a Western boy, have risked your life for his people."

"But the rifle," Biff objected, looking nervously west where Hamil, Suvaji, and the Communist soldiers were swiftly advancing toward the river bend.

The Khamba spoke again, still looking at Biff.

"He says he was always a bandit," Taz translated. "That is the way of the Khamba. But when the Red horde invaded, he became a Tibetan. He will be a Tibetan until they are driven from the land. He asks that you tell people of your land how foolish it is for peoples of one country to fight each other while the enemy is within its borders."

"I couldn't agree more," said Biff. "But what about

the rifle? How am I going to help here without the rifle?"

The Khamba began talking to Taz again.

Taz's eyes widened.

"We are going on," said the Sherpa boy. "We are going to push on to Lhasa with the Lama. The Khambas are going to stay here and hold off Hamil and Suvaji and the rest until we get away."

"But—but why?" Biff demanded. "Why should toe get away?"

"Because," said Taz, his eyes widening, "we are going to take with us—the Glowing Buddha!"

Biff's jaw dropped. "The Glowing Buddha," he whispered. "But where is it?"

Slowly, the Khamba untied the trail churns from the back of the yak, and taking a long look at the greasy bags, held them out to Biff.

"It's in one of the churns!" gasped Taz.

Biff reached out for the bags, his knees quaking. He couldn't believe it. Here, in one of the leather bags which they had hoped to steal—the bags which they had watched flopping on the yak's back for mile after mile—was the sacred statue for which the Communists had searched for years, the symbol of a country's great religion.

The Glowing Buddha!

The Khamba let loose his grip on the bags, and began to rattle off a stream of rapid Tibetan to Taz. When he had finished, he walked to the old Lama,

gripped his hand, and slapped the flank of the old man's pony to start it on its way.

He turned to the two boys, raised his hand and pointed east, then hurried to his post behind the boulders, Biff's rifle in his hand.

As Biff slung the bags across his pony's back, Taz briefed him.

"The Lama is to take us to the man in Lhasa who has been in contact with the phantom caravan all these years. The Khamba says perhaps this man will be able to help us get it out of the country."

Biff leaped onto Oakey's back.

Suddenly, there was the whine of a ricocheting bullet.

Instinctively he ducked and looked west.

Hamil, Suvaji, and the soldiers were galloping up the bank across the river, and already one of the Khambas had winged a shot over the water.

The Khamba leader was waving frantically for them to leave.

With a last look, the boys wheeled their horses about and spurred them across the plateau, weaving in and out among the boulders to keep stone between themselves and the bullets which were now flying thick and fast.

Glancing back, Biff could see that, though they were outnumbered, the Khambas were in an excellent strategic position. They had plentiful cover on their side of the river, while Hamil, Suvaji, and the soldiers

had little or none on their side. That meant that Hamil and his cohorts were pinned down until nightfall which was hours away. By the time the Communists could pick up their trail, they would be well on their way. Unfortunately, thought Biff, when that happened, their friends the Khambas might not be in a condition to appreciate the honor of being outflanked heroes.

The golden domes of Lhasa glowed dully in the soft light of dusk.

As Biff and Taz guided their weary ponies through the dust of the road leading to the Forbidden City, they could see the great Potala Palace, high on a great stone hill towering above everything around it. The stone palace rose tier upon tier, a huge, rambling fortress with great, five-colored flags flopping at almost every parapet. Stone steps, like those Biff had seen in pictures of castles, led down from the palace, which had been the sacred residence of every Dalai Lama for a thousand years of Tibetan history—until this year.

The road was clogged with people now, as pilgrims, merchants, herdsmen, farmers, and a score of caravans were funneled onto the main road from trails and paths leading from all points of Tibet.

But as they neared Lhasa's gates, Biff could see that there were only two soldiers on duty. They were not inspecting anything but merely watching idly as the parade of travelers passed into the city.

"I can tell from the talk I've been hearing along the

way, there's some sort of religious holiday being celebrated. The Reds are probably on their good behavior," Taz whispered, as they followed the old Lama past the guards at the gate.

They kept close behind the Lama now. And when Biff saw the Lama sway momentarily in his saddle, he had a panicky few seconds. He wondered what they would do if the Lama should faint or die. Neither he nor Taz had the vaguest notion of the identity of the mysterious man to whom they were to deliver the Glowing Buddha.

The Lama regained his equilibrium, however, and they slowly drifted up the hill with the throng of travelers. The city was alive with lights and festivities. Monks strolled along, chanting and spinning their prayer wheels. Beggars crawled among the throngs, whimpering for alms. Merchants hawked their wares from piles of pots, pans, rugs, vegetables, and cheap jewelry. Cobblers plied their trade in the dim light of butter lamps held by dutiful sons. Letter writers scribbled epistles of love for illiterate swains. Children flew kites—even on into the night.

The signs of enemy occupation were few. The only sign the two boys saw, or rather heard, as they rode along, was the constant bellow of the propaganda horns—the horns connected to radios which belched the official Communist line for hour upon hour all over Lhasa.

Suddenly, the Lama was turning off the road on

which they had been riding. The old man headed down a street that ran alongside the wall of the Potala Palace.

The clop, clop of their ponies' hoofs began to echo in the narrow street as traffic thinned and disappeared. The street was very dark as they came to a high, stone wall with a heavy, wooden gate in its center. The old Lama leaned down, opened the gate, and led them through it. They passed into a garden and through it to a big brass-bound door in the center of the stone house.

The Lama raised the knocker and let it drop once, then again. He began to totter as they waited, and Biff leaped to the ground to steady the old man in the saddle.

As he did, the door was suddenly flung open. Light streamed out at them, and in the doorway stood a tall, handsome man of a complexion much like Taz Norkay's. He wore a silk, kimonolike robe and horn-rimmed glasses.

He helped the old Lama gently to the ground. As he did so, Biff looked straight across his back into the lighted room beyond.

Sitting there in two chairs, looking out at the scene, were Tom Brewster and Izling Norkay!

CHAPTER XX

C.Q.—Katmandu

“DAD!”

“Father!”

The two boys rushed impulsively past the kimono-clad man to their fathers.

There were tears in the eyes of the two men as they hugged the boys. But before Biff could begin to explain what had happened, his father held up his hand, saying, “Just a minute, son.” He rushed to the door to help the handsome man, who was half carrying the Lama into the house.

The man guided the Lama to a couch, and studied him for a long moment. Then he shook his head slowly and clapped his hands twice. Two servants hurried into the room and carried the old man tenderly away.

The handsome man turned to Biff and Taz, saying in clipped British tones:

“The Glowing Buddha?”

It was the first English Biff had heard from a Tibetan's mouth, and for a second, he gaped. When he had recovered his wits, he wheeled about, ran out the door where Oakey stood, and removed the leather trail churns from the pony's back. Entering the house, he took two steps toward the tall man, bowed, and handed him the greasy bags.

The man's eyes widened. He stared at the churns, then at the boys, then back at the churns, and a slow, wonderful smile spread across his face.

"Delightful camouflage," he said. "Delightful. We of Tibet are eternally grateful to you, Mr.—Biff Brewster and Mr. Tazling Norkay."

"We've been telling Mr. Rimpoche about you two," said Tom Brewster. "Boys, Mr. Thigpet Rimpoche, our man in Lhasa!"

The tall man bowed and shook hands with each boy.

"Very young to be heroes." Lie smiled.

The boys blushed.

"Through no fault of our own, believe me," said Biff.

"I would ask for your whole story, but I can see you two are bushed," said his father.

"We can remedy that," said Thigpet Rimpoche. He clapped his hands, and from another room there appeared a slightly built woman with delicate Oriental features. She wore silk pantaloons and brocaded slippers.

Mr. Rimpoche gave her some softly phrased

instructions, and she bowed from the room.

The boys bathed in a curved, enameled tub, after ushering the little pantaloon-clad lady gently from the room, notwithstanding her anxious protests that it was her duty to pour the water on them as they bathed.

They ate—on rich, metallic dishes—strange exotic food that defied identification by any Western palate.

Then they talked. They told of their adventures beginning with the camel ride and ending with the Khamba stand at the river which had enabled them to reach Lhasa with the Glowing Buddha.

Their fathers' story was shorter. Immediately after they had left the gorge, they had heard Biff's quail-whistle SOS. They then had scaled the mountain near the border station, skirted the guards, and gone looking for the Khamba who was supposed to meet them there. But the Khamba was busy chasing Biff and Taz. They found themselves stranded with no idea where to turn next. So they did what Biff had anticipated they would do. They fled to the man who had been responsible for their coming to Tibet in the first place—Mr. Thigpet Rimpoche, the Dalai Lama's secret ally in Lhasa, a man whom the Red occupation authorities and many Tibetans thought was a collaborator.

"We've been here two days," Tom Brewster concluded, "trying to figure how we are going to get out of this country."

“Any luck?” Biff asked, looking from his father to Izling Norkay and then to Thigpet Rimpoche.

Thigpet Rimpoche glanced at his wrist watch. “I am going to explore some more possibilities. The holiday begins officially in a few minutes. As a Tibetan official, I must be there. Get a good night’s sleep and, perhaps, tomorrow, I shall have some news for you.”

Thigpet Rimpoche bowed from the room, and a half hour later, the weary travelers tumbled into bed, and were soon asleep.

The first thing Biff’s eyes focused on when he opened them at dawn was a radio. It was not just an ordinary radio but a fine, communication-type receiver of the kind used by amateur radio “hams” the world over. Next to it was a matching short-wave transmitter of expensive make. They rested on a table in the bedroom to which Biff and Taz had been assigned by Thigpet Rimpoche.

Biff recognized the equipment because he held a “ham” license back in the States.

“But it looks as if it hasn’t been used in ages,” said Biff. “There’s no mike, no bug . . .”

“Mike? Bug?” asked Taz, sitting up in the bed next to Biff’s.

“Microphone and code key,” Biff explained, sliding out of bed and stepping to the table with the equipment. He looked around behind it and saw no trailing wires.

“It’s not even hooked up,” he said.

“Our Red friends disapprove of listening to or sending radio signals,” said a voice at the door. Thigpet Rimpoche stood there, a cup of butter tea in his hand.

“Were you a ‘ham’?” Biff asked with a smile.

“T 105 L,” said Mr. Rimpoche, bowing.

“W 5604 J,” announced Biff, repeating his “call” and bowing back.

“Before *they* came, I spent many happy hours talking to ‘hams’ all over the world,” said Thigpet Rimpoche. “I learned it while I was at school in England. Because of the altitude here, I was able to propagate an effective signal all over Asia and, on the shorter wave lengths, even to America. Since I was the only amateur in Tibet, I, of course, was a very popular C.Q. call.”

Taz looked puzzled at the expression.

“C.Q. is a call announcing you’ll talk to anyone or to anyone in a certain area,” Biff explained.

“When the Reds came, they made me take down my antenna from the mountain,” Rimpoche went on. “However, they displayed their liberality by allowing me to retain my equipment,”—he laughed—“which is as useless without an antenna as a plane without a propeller.”

A little bell rang in Biff’s brain, but before he could answer it, the tall man had put down his cup and said, “But that is all history. If you will get dressed and join me in the parlor, I should like to talk to you and your

fathers.”

The boys leaped from bed, dived into their clothes, and joined their fathers, Biff recalling that he had never heard anyone but his grandmother call a room a parlor.

When Thigpet Rimpoche joined them, his expression was sober.

“Any news?” asked Tom Brewster.

Their host stared out the window. “None,” he said. “All escape routes seem closed.”

The Brewsters and Norkays exchanged worried looks.

“What’s more, your position in this house grows more dangerous by the hour.”

“Why?” asked Tom Brewster.

“My informers advise me that the Red occupation governor here has received some sort of radio message from Farid Hamil.”

“That walkie-talkie,” Biff muttered.

“He is on his way to Lhasa. He has captured the Khambas but reported that they did not have the Glowing Buddha. He says he suspects the statue has been brought here to Lhasa. But how *could* he know?”

“He must have seen Taz and me leave with the Lama,” said Biff.

“Yes—that must be it,” said Thigpet Rimpoche.

“We *must* leave at once,” said Tom Brewster. “Besides, we have endangered your position here too much already.”

The engineer walked to the window which overlooked the crowded road on which they had ridden from the city gate. Even at this early hour, the street was thronged with celebrants. They could hear the sounds of laughter, and it seemed that everywhere they looked, there were kites flying.

"With all this excitement, it shouldn't be too difficult to slip out of the city," said Mr. Brewster.

"It is beyond the city walls—between here and Nepal—that you would be in greatest danger," said Thigpet Rimpoche. "Here in the city, the Reds have only a small force, to minimize the appearance of occupation. But out in our land, they are everywhere, tightening their grip on everything."

Tom Brewster looked out at the crowded sky over Lhasa. "If we just stuck kite strings in our hands, we could probably stroll out of town without trouble," he said, chuckling.

Biff snapped his fingers. "That's it!" he exclaimed.

"What's it?" demanded his father.

"Our *out!*" said Biff excitedly. "A kite!"

"Oh, fly out on a kite, eh?" said Mr. Brewster.

"Fly out, but not on a kite." Biff grinned. He turned to Thigpet Rimpoche and said, "Mr. Rimpoche, do you have any copper wire left?"

"Yes, of course," said the tall man. "I saved hundreds of feet."

"We're getting warm," Biff announced, with a big smile. He crooked his finger at the others and

beckoned them to follow him into the bedroom which he and Taz had shared. He stopped at the “ham rig” and slapped his hand on the instruments. “Here’s our out!” he said.

“Whom are you going to call, the U. S. Marines?” his father demanded.

“If so, how?” asked Thigpet Rimpoche. “Using what antenna?”

Biff pointed out the window.

“One like that,” he said, pointing to a great, colorful kite floating over the roofs of the city.

Thigpet Rimpoche looked at the kite, then back at Biff, and began to smile.

“Very ingenious. You will put your antenna on a kite,” he said. “But whom are you going to contact, and how are they going to help you?”

“This may sound fantastic,” said Biff, “but I’m going to get on this radio, and I’m going to call Mr. Shake Lakum, and tell him to get in his plane and come and rescue us!”

CHAPTER XXI

Next Stop—India

THE copper wire was long enough. It wafted the kite high above every other kite in the sky over Lhasa. Attached to its ribs was a folded dipole, cut to the exact wave length Thigpet Rimpoche told Biff was most effective in covering Nepal and India.

Tom Brewster saw Biff readying the microphone for use, and said, "Son, do you think the code key would be safer?"

"Any radio operator understands code," said Biff, "even the Chinese. But even if they heard English around here, they might not understand a word."

Thigpet Rimpoche nodded agreement. He looked down happily at the glowing dials of the radio equipment which had not been "fired up" for years. He smiled mischievously and said, "It is nice of the occupation forces to furnish the electricity for our little transmittal—especially since they have been rationing electricity in terms of those who co-operate

and those who do not. I, of course, get all the electricity I wish, since I am enlightened!"

Biff looked with admiration at this courageous patriot who could feign collaboration to perform his duty to his Dalai Lama, keep the Red tyrants happy, and all the while sabotage their efforts and laugh behind their backs.

Biff studied his meters once more, flipped all switches to make sure they were working, looked at his antenna current reading, and took a deep breath.

"Okay," he said, looking around at the others and raising his crossed fingers. "Let's see if we're on the air.

He flipped the "transmit" switch and began his call. "This is T 105 L in Lhasa, Tibet, calling CQ, Katmandu," he droned. "T 105 L calling CQ, Katmandu, Nepal. Come in, please. Over and standing by."

He flipped the receiver switch and waited for an answer.

An answer would hardly have described it!

Within one minute, the speaker before him was alive with responses to his call. "Hams" in a dozen countries, it appeared, were falling all over their rigs to speak to T 105 L!

"I told you it was a popular call." Thigpet Rimpoche smiled happily.

"Magic," breathed Izling Norkay—his first words since the whole, fantastic performance had begun.

Biff grinned and switched the transmitter back on.

Before turning his mike on, he said, "Well, we're on the air. Let's see if we can arrange to get *in* the air."

He turned his mike back on, identified his station as required by International Radio Law, and said, "Okay, boys. I know you love me, but everybody off this frequency now except Katmandu, Nepal, calls. This is May Day, hams, May Day—and I do mean distress call. Just Katmandu, Nepal, calls, please, on this frequency. T 105 L, standing by."

A pause, the hum of a carrier suddenly tuned to his frequency, and then . . . sweetly, clearly, and beautifully, an answer right from Katmandu, Nepal, the very first try!

Call letters finished, the operator in Katmandu proceeded in the crustiest of British tones to dress Biff down. "What's this dashed May Day nonsense? Is this a joke?" he demanded. "You can jolly well be reported, old boy—*harumph*." He snorted. "Over," he said.

"No," explained Biff patiently, "it is not a joke." It was deadly serious, he said, and he informed his contact where they were, what their predicament was, and whom they wanted to contact.

"Sorry, old boy," was his contact's only apology. And as the Britisher placed a call on his phone patch to Shake Lakum at Katmandu Airport, he told Biff he was a retired British Army colonel living in Nepal, and Biff must come to see him when this business was over.

Biff heard the colonel get the airport, heard him switched to the control tower where, it was explained,

Shake Lakum would be found.

Five seconds later, Biff heard the bush pilot's unmistakable "hello," clear as though Shake were just around the corner in a phone booth. He heard the colonel explaining the technique of talking on a phone patch call and then heard Shake ask, "Who is it from?"

"From Mr. Biff Brewster in Lhasa, Tibet," said the colonel. "You may proceed, sir."

Biff didn't blame Shake under the circumstances.

"Look, Biff," he heard Shake growl. "Can the phony British accent and tell me where you are!"

"It's not a phony British accent," the colonel broke in with a snort. "And he *is* in Lhasa, Tibet. Now will you get on with the call, confound it, and stop cluttering up the airways?"

Biff was choking with laughter, but he finally explained their predicament to Shake Lakum, stressing the dangers involved, but emphasizing the hopelessness of their plight if Shake did not come to their rescue. He said, "Over," then stood by for Shake's answer.

There was a pause, then Shake came on. "So what's the problem?" he drawled. "I've had to bail you out before, haven't I? What's one more time? I've got to test-fly this super charger anyway. So I might just as well fly up there. I've always wanted to see the Forbidden City!" There was a pause. "Oh, can I bring you anything?" Shake added nonchalantly. "Magazines, candy?"

Biff could almost see the colonel's mustache bristling.

Biff described the terrain around Lhasa, suggested Shake pick them up on the plain west of the city. He told the pilot they would be riding four ponies.

"And wearing monk's disguises," Thigpet Rimpoche interjected.

"And disguised as monks," Biff added. "Plow long should it take you to get here?"

"I've been looking at a map as you talked," said Shake. "I figure it about two hours, fifty minutes—maybe two fifty-five," said Shake, the hint of a smile in his tone. "I'll buzz your city hall once—then land on that flat spot west of town. Over."

Biff knew he shouldn't, but he couldn't resist giving the crusty old colonel one little needle before he signed off.

"Oh, Shake—before I go,"—he paused—"ain't science wonderful?"

"Over and out!" barked the colonel. Then he laughed, and added, "Good show, chaps. Chins up!"

Two hours and fifty minutes later, garbed in their monks' robes, the two Brewsters and the two Norkays rode slowly toward Lhasa's west gate. Across Biff's saddle rested one greasy, leather trail churn.

They had waited until the last minute to head for the rendezvous, for they did not want to risk unnecessary exposure to the alerted Chinese authorities.

As they rode, Biff reviewed the last-minute plan launched by Thigpet Rimpoche to expedite their escape effort. He had sent orders, through his underground organization of Tibetan patriots, to empty the gas tanks of the five planes stationed at the Red airfield on the edge of the city, hoping to foil pursuit from the air. Other patriots were pulling loose the distributor wires and flattening the tires on every Red military vehicle in town. And the word had gone out for the streets to be clogged with as many people as possible to complicate pursuit on the ground.

Thigpet Rimpoche made it plain he doubted that Shake Lakum could possibly fly over the terrible mountains between Katmandu and Lhasa, let alone do it on the casually tight schedule he had set for himself. Tom Brewster was skeptical himself, and Izling Norkay could not believe that a single-engine airplane would swoop down and pluck them out of the hands of the Reds. The Sherpa guide was quite frankly scanning the nearby mountains, picking out the most likely pass for them to take on their ground journey to freedom.

Taz had adopted a wait-and-see attitude.

Biff, however, was sure that if Shake said he'd be there, he'd be there.

And then came the inevitable last-minute fly in the ointment.

They were almost at the west gate. No one had paid the slightest attention to them in their monks' garb. As their eyes peered ahead to the gate, trying to count

the number of guards, they saw coming toward them a column of mounted Red soldiers. The soldiers obviously had been in a skirmish, and as they drew closer, Biff knew exactly what skirmish it had been. Behind the soldiers rode four bound prisoners, two of them wearing bloody head bandages.

Leading the parade were Farid Hamil and friend Suvaji!

The four “monks” ducked their heads beneath their hoods. Biff felt his mouth go dry. If either Hamil or Suvaji should recognize one of the four “monks,” there would be no need for Shake to make his landing!

But Hamil and Suvaji were tired, dirty, and disgusted. Their battle at the boulders had left them empty-handed; the golden trophy had slipped through their grasp. They were rehearsing what alibis they would give to the Lhasa high command about their failure, and they were not looking for Brewsters and Norkays. Not just then, anyway.

So they passed the “monks,” utterly unaware that they were within a few feet of the answer to their problems. The two men were far enough ahead of the Khambas for Biff to peek out from his hood at the prisoners and, in fact, catch the eye of their startled leader. With a big wink and a pat on the greasy leather bag before him, he conveyed to the Tibetan bandit how near to success was Operation Caravan.

At that precise, ill-timed moment, Shake arrived over Lhasa.

He roared over Potala Palace, buzzed the startled crowd on the road, and began to let down for his landing on the plain west of town.

The four “monks” spurred their ponies toward the west gate.

Suddenly from behind them, they heard an excited shout.

“Stop those horses! Those horses with the yellow ears!” cried Farid Hamil to the guards at the gate.

“Him and his big fat memory!” Biff panted, lashing Oakey to greater effort.

The guards at the gate were confused. They didn’t understand Hamil’s command in English. Hamil shouted again, this time in Chinese. The guards leaped for the rifles leaning against the gatehouse.

The four mounted “monks” thundered into their midst, and the soldiers rolled in the dust.

The *Williwaw* touched down on the plain ahead, dust billowing around it.

Up leaped the guards, grabbing again for their rifles. This time they got them, cocked them, and standing shoulder to shoulder, they aimed at the fleeing figures.

“KA—RUNCH!”

Straight between them, legs flying, galloped the bow-legged, crook-tailed, cross-eyed Dascha!

“Thump—thump!” Down again went the guards, their rifles plopping into the dirt.

After his equine buddies flew Dascha, across the

Lhasa plain, where the four “monks” were putting less and less distance between themselves and the *Williwaw*.

The guards jumped up. They weren’t to be denied this time.

But there was nothing left to shoot at except a swirling cloud of dust.

“Taxi?” shouted Shake, as the “monks” galloped up to the side of the *Williwaw*.

“India, please,” puffed Biff, climbing aboard first. “We have a date with the Dalai Lama.”

“Certainly, sir,” said Shake. “Lemme have your”—he made a face as he lifted the greasy trail churn gingerly aboard—“baggage,” he finished.

“A little Tibetan souvenir,” smiled Tom Brewster, piling in after Biff.

Shake stared, bug-eyed. “That’s not the—”

“Yes, that is THE . . .” shouted Taz, climbing aboard and pulling his father up behind him.

“No horses, no dogs on this line, sorry,” said Shake, looking out at Oakey, Dokey, and Dascha, standing forlornly at the door. He slammed it shut, gunned the engine, and taxied into the wind for take-off.

As the *Williwaw* lifted from the Lhasa Plain, they saw that not a single Red plane, not a single Red vehicle had been able to move to stop them. Thigpet Rimpoche’s protection for the Golden Buddha had worked to the very last.

And as the *Williwaw* banked south toward India,

they saw below them two yellow-eared ponies and a cross-eyed dog galloping away toward the distant hills.

“Well,” said Biff, “they’re going home.”